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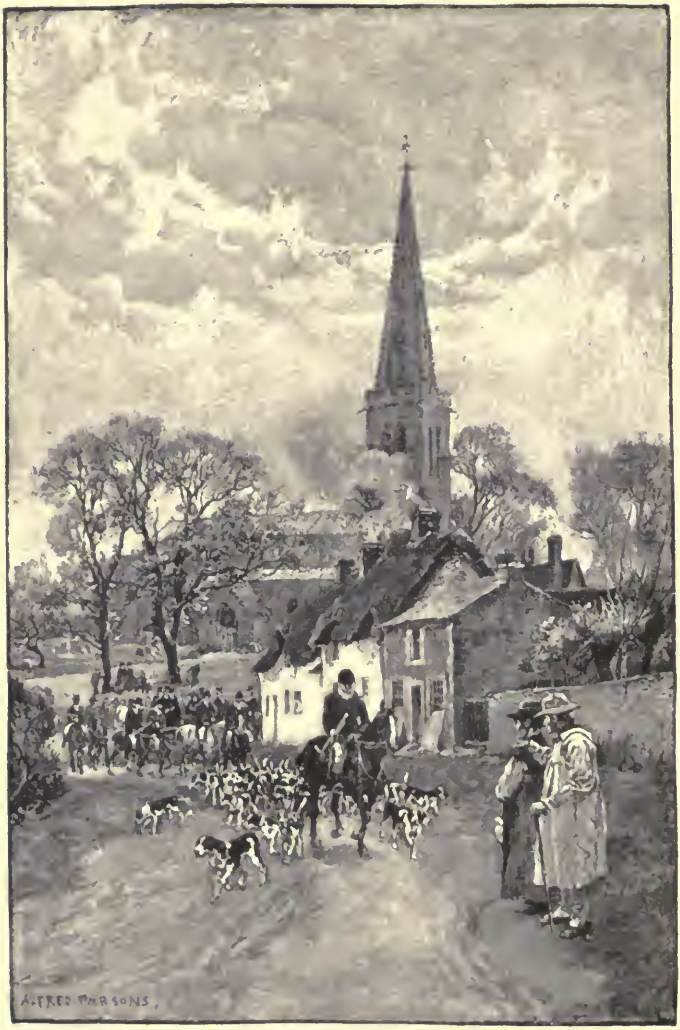
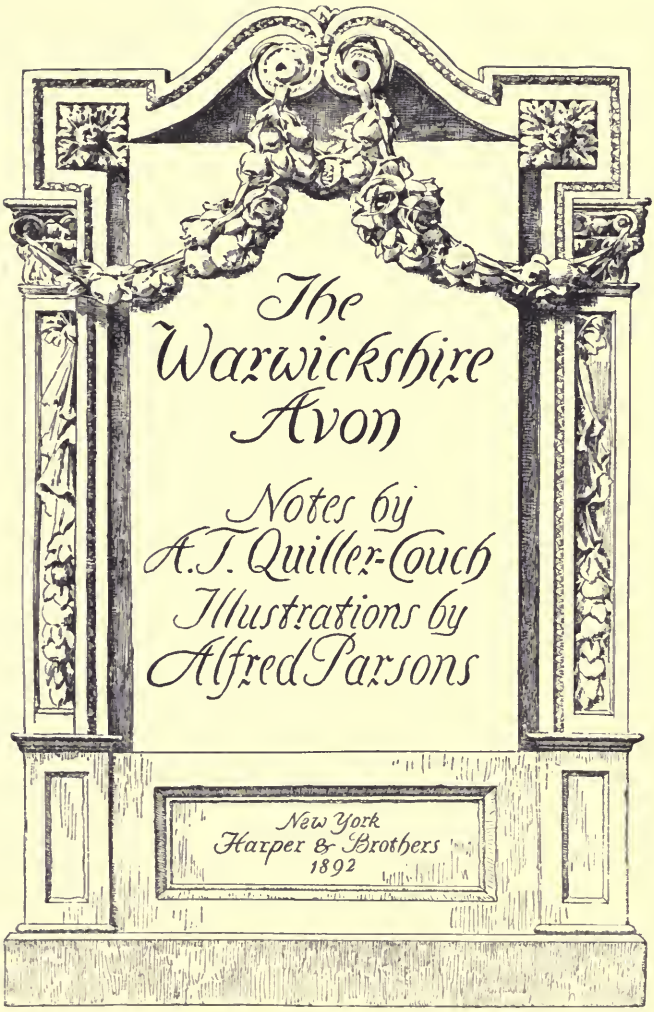


NASEBY CHURCH


The
Warwickshire
Avon
Notes by
A. T. Quiller-Couch
Illustrations by
Alfred Parsons
New York
Harper & Brothers
1892

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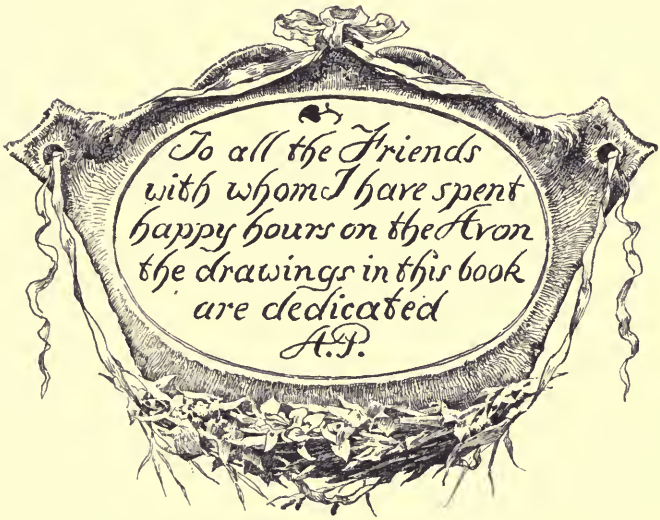

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OUR journey opens in Northamptonshire, and in that season when the year grows ancient,

> "Not yet on summer's death, nor on the birth
> Of trembling winter."

In the stubble the crack! crack! of a stray gun speaks, now and again, of partridge-time. Over the pastures, undulating with ridge and furrow, where the black oxen feed, patches of gloom and gleam are scurrying as the wind—westerly, with a touch of north—chases the light showers under a vivid sun. Along the drab road darts a bullfinch, his family after him; pauses a moment among the dogrose berries; is off again, and lost in the dazzle ahead.

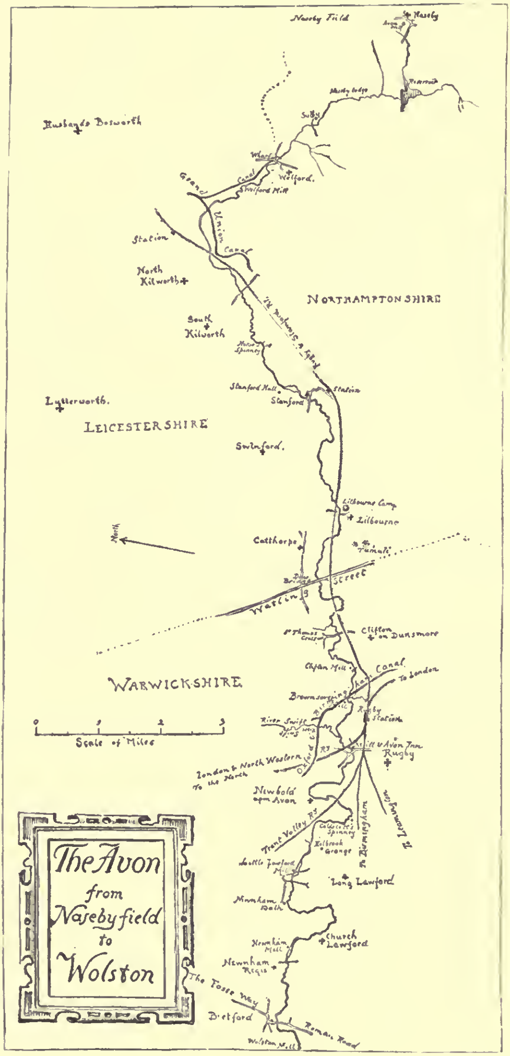
A high grassy ridge stands up from the plain; and upon it, white and salient against a dark cloud, the spire of a village church. From its belfry, says the sexton, you may spy forty parishes: but more important are the few cottages immediately below. They seem conspicuously inglorious: yet their name is written large in the histories. It speaks of a bright June day when along this ridge—then unenclosed and scattered with broom and heath flowers—the rattle of musketry and outcries of battle rolled from morning to late afternoon, by which time was lost a king with his kingdom. For the village is Naseby. Here, by the market green, the

Parliamentarians ranged their baggage. Yonder, on Mill Hill and Broad Moor, with just a hollow between, the two armies faced each other; the royalists with bean-stalks in their hats, their enemies with badges of white linen. To the left, Sulby hedges were lined with Ireton's dragoons. And the rest is an old story: Rupert, tardily returning from a headlong charge, finds no "cause" left to befriend, no foe to fight. While his men were pillaging, Cromwell has snatched the day. His Majesty is flying through Market-Harborough towards Leicester, and thither along the dusty roads his beaten regiments trail after him, with the Ironsides at their heels, hewing hip and thigh.

An obelisk, set about with thorn-bushes and shaded by

NASEBY MONUMENT

oak and birch, marks the battle-field. It rests on a base of rough moss-grown stones, and holds out "a useful lesson to British kings never to exceed the bounds of their just prerogative, and to British subjects never to swerve from the allegiance due to their legitimate monarch." And the advice is well meant, no doubt; but, as the Watch asked of Dogberry, "How if they will not?"



The Avon
from
Naseby field
to
Wolston
Naseby Field
Naseby
Husbands Bosworth
Welford
Grand Union Canal
Station
North Kilworth
South Kilworth
NORTHAMPTONSHIRE
Stanford
Station
Lutterworth
LEICESTERSHIRE
Swinford
Lilbourne
Catthorpe
North
Watling Street
Clifton on Dunsmore
Canal
To London
WARWICKSHIRE
Scale of Miles
0
1
2
3
Rugby
Station
London & North Western
To the North
Newbold on Avon
Trent Valley Ry
To Birmingham
To Leamington
Long Lawford
Church Lawford
Newnham Regis
The Fosse Way
Bretford
Roman Road

Naseby, however, has another boast. Here, beside the monument, we are standing on the water-shed of England. In the fields below rise many little springs, whereof those to the south and east unite to form the Ise brook, which runs into the Nen, and so find their goal in the North Sea; those

SULBY ABBEY

to the west form the Avon, and seek the British Channel. And it is westward that we turn our faces—we, whom you shall briefly know as P. and Q.; for the business that brings us to Naseby is to find here the source of Shakespeare's Avon, and so follow its windings downward to the Severn.

The source is modest enough, being but a well amid the "good cabbage" of the inn garden. To-day, a basin of mere brick encloses it; but in 1823, the date of the obelisk, some person of refinement would adorn also Avon Well; and procured from Mr. Groggan of London a Swan of Avon in plaster; and Mr. Groggan contrived that the water should gush elegantly from her bill, but not for long. For the small boy came with stones, after his kind; and now, sans wing, sans head, sans everything, she crouches among the cabbages, "a rare bird upon earth."

From Avon Well the spring flows to the northwest, and we follow it through "wide-skirted meads" dotted with rub-

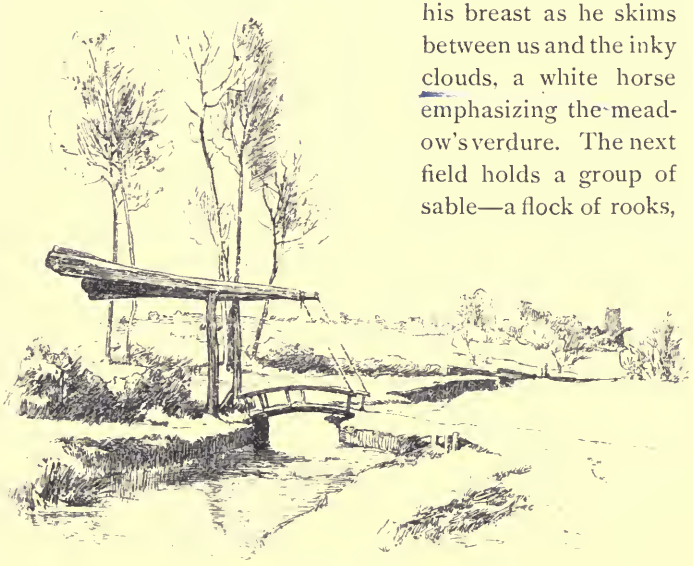
bing-posts and divided by stiff ox fences (the bullfinches of the fox-hunter—for we are in the famous Pytchley country), past a broad reservoir fringed with reed and poplars, and so through more pastures to Sulby Abbey. And always, as we look back, Naseby spire marks our starting-point. About three miles down, the runnel has grown to a respectable brook, quite large enough to have kept supplied the abbey fish-ponds.

On the site of this abbey—founded circa 1155 by William de Wydeville in honor of the Blessed Virgin—now stands a red-brick farm-house, passably old, and coated with ivy. Of the vanished building it conserves but two relics—a stone coffin and the floriated cover of another. The course of the stream beside it, and for some way below, is traced by the thorn-bushes under which it winds (in springtime how pleasantly!) until Welford is reached—a small brick village. Here, after rioting awhile in a maze of spendthrift channels, it recombines its waters to run under its first bridge, and begin a sober life by supplying a branch of the Grand Junction Canal. A round-house at the canal's head forms, with the bridge, what Mr. Samuel Ireland, in his Beauties of the Warwickshire Avon (1795), calls "an agreeable landscape, giving that sort of view which, being simple in itself, seldom fails to constitute elegance." Rather, to our thinking, the landscape's beauty lies in its suggestion, in that here we touch the true heart of the country life; of quiet nights dividing slow, familiar days, during which man and man's work grow steeped in the soil's complexion, secure of all but

WELFORD CANAL HOUSE

"the penalty of Adam,
The season's difference."

It is enough that we are grateful for it as we pass on down the valley where the canal and stream run side by side—the canal demurely between straight banks, the stream below trying always how many curves it can make in each field, until quieted for a while by the dam of a little red-brick mill, set down all alone in the brilliant green. The thorn-bushes are giving place to willows—not such as fringe the Thames, but gray trees of a smaller leaf, and, by your leave, more beautiful. Our walk as we follow the towpath of the canal, having the river on our left, is full of peaceful incidents and subtle revelations of color—a lock, a quaint swing-bridge, a swallow taking the sunlight on his breast as he skims between us and the inky clouds, a white horse emphasizing the meadow's verdure. The next field holds a group of sable—a flock of rooks,



SWING-BRIDGE NEAR WELFORD

a pair of black horses, a dozen velvet-black oxen, beside whom the thirteenth ox seems consciously indecorous in a half-mourning suit of iron-gray. Next, from a hawthorn "total gules" with autumn berries, we start six magpies; and so, like Christian, "give three skips and go on singing" beneath the spires and towers of this and that small village (Welford and North and South Kilworth) that look down from the edging hills.

Below South Kilworth, where a windmill crowns the upland, the valley turns southward, and we leave the canal to

STANFORD HALL

track the Avon again, that here is choked with rushes. For a mile or two we pursue it, now jumping, now crossing by a timely pole or hurdle, from Northamptonshire into Leicestershire and back (for the stream divides these counties), until it enters the grounds of Stanford Hall, and under the yellowing chestnuts of the park grows suddenly a dignified sheet of water, with real swans.

Stanford Hall (the seat of Lord Bray) is, according to Ireland, "spacious, but wants those pictorial decorations that would render it an object of attention to the traveller of taste." But to us, who saw it in the waning daylight, the

comfortable square house seemed full of quiet charm, as did the squat perpendicular church, untouched by the restorer, and backed by a grassy mound that rises to the eastern window, and the two bridges (the older one disused) under which the Avon leaves the park. A twisted wych-elm divides them, its roots set among broad burdock leaves.

Below Stanford the stream contracts again, and again meanders among black cattle and green fields to Lilburne. Here it winds past a congeries of grassy mounds, dotted now with black-faced sheep, that was once a Roman encampment, the Tripontium mentioned by the emperor Antoninus in his journey from London to Lincoln. Climbing to the eminence of the prætorium and gazing westward, we see on the high ground two beech-crowned tumuli side by side, clearly an outpost or speculum overlooking Watling Street, the Roman road that passes just beyond the ridge "from Dover into Chestre." This same high ground is the

ROMAN CAMP, LILBURNE

eastern hem of Dunsmore Heath, once so dismally ravaged by the Dun Cow of legend, till Guy of Warwick rode out and slew her in single combat. The heath, a long ridge of lias bordering our river to the south for many miles to come, is now enclosed and tilled; but its straggling cottages, duck

ponds, and furze clumps still suggest the time when all was common land.

At our feet, close under the encampment, an antique bridge crosses Avon. Beside it is hollowed a sheep-washing pool, and across the road stands a little church. Tempted by its elaborate window mouldings, we poke our heads in at the door, but at once withdraw them to cough and sneeze. The place is given over to dense smoke and a small decent man, who says that a service will be held in ten minutes, and what to do with the stove he doesn't know. So we leave him, and pass on, trudging towards Catthorpe, a mile below.

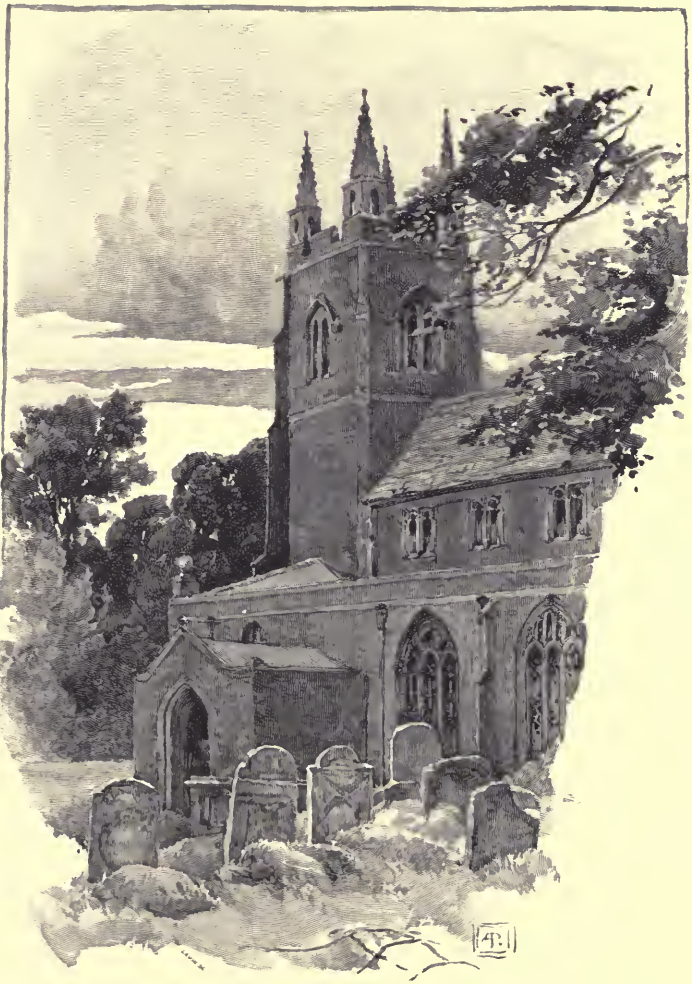
A wooden paling, once green, but subdued by years to all delicate tints, fronts the village street. Behind, in a garden of cypress and lilacs, lies the old vicarage, with deep bow-windows sunk level with the turf, a noteworthy house. For John Dyer, author of "Grongar Hill"—"Bard of the Fleece," as Wordsworth hails him—held Catthorpe living for a few years in the last century; and here, while his friends

> "in the town, in the busy, gay town,
> Forgot such a man as John Dyer,"

looked out on this gray garden wall, over which the fig-tree clambers, and "relished versing." The church stands close by, a ragged cedar beside it, an elm drooping before its plain tower. We take a long look before descending again to the river, like Dyer

> "resolved, this charming day,
> Into the open fields to stray,
> And have no roof above our head
> But that whereon the gods do tread."

Just below Catthorpe, by a long line of arches called Dow



STANFORD CHURCH

(or Dove) Bridge, Watling Street pushes across the river with Roman directness. This bridge marks the meeting-point of three counties, for beyond it we step into Warwickshire. It is indifferently modern, yet "the scene, though simple, aided by a group of cattle then passing, had sufficient attraction in the meridian of a summer sun to in-

CATTHORPE CHURCH

duce" the egregious Ireland "to attempt a sketch of it as a picturesque view," and supply us with a sentence to be quoted a thousand times during our voyage, and always with ribald appreciation.

The valley narrows as we draw near Rugby. Clifton on Dunsmore, eminent by situation only, stands boldly up on the left, and under it, by Clifton mill, the stream runs down to Brownsover. Brownsover too has its mill, with a pool and cluster of wych-elms below. And hard by we find (as we think) Tom Brown's willow, the tree which wouldn't "throw out straight hickory shoots twelve feet long, with no

DOW BRIDGE ON WATLING STREET

leaves, worse luck !" where Tom sat aloft, and "Velveteens," the keeper, below, through that soft, hazy day in the May-fly season, till the sun came slanting through the branches, and told of locking-up near at hand. We are hushed as we stand before it, and taste the reward of such as "identify."

And now, just ahead, on the same line of hill as Clifton, stands the town of Rugby. No good view of it can be found from the river-side, for the middle distance is always a straight line of railway sheds or embankments. Perhaps the best is to be had from the towpath of the Oxford Canal, marked high above our right by a line of larch and poplar, where a tall aqueduct carries it over the river Swift.

This is the stream which, coming from Lutterworth, bore down in 1427 the ashes of John Wiclif to the Avon. Forty years after his peaceful interment the Council of Constance gave orders to exhume and burn his body, to see if it could be discerned from those of the faithful. "In obedience thereto," says Fuller, "Richard Fleming, bishop of Lincoln, diocesan of Lutterworth, sent his officers (vultures with a

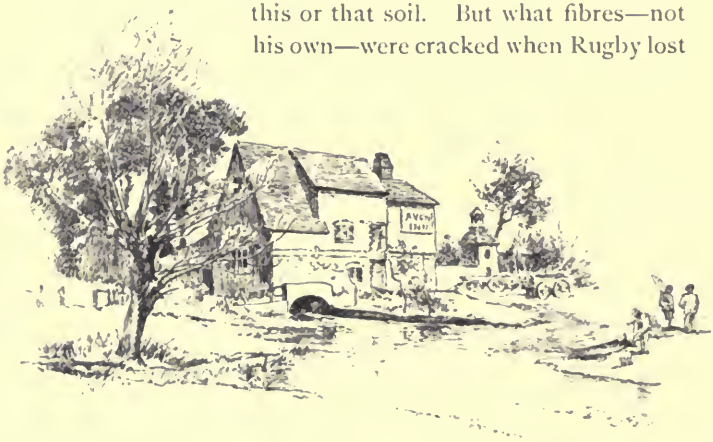
quick sight sent at a dead carcass!) to ungrave him accordingly. To Lutterworth they come—sumner, commissary, official, chancellor, proctors, doctors, and the servants (so that the remnant of the body would not hold out a bone amongst so many hands), take what is left out of the grave, and burn them to ashes, and cast them into Swift, a brook running hard by. Thus the brook hath conveyed his ashes into Avon, Avon into Severn, Severn into the narrow seas, they into the main ocean. And thus the ashes of Wiclif are the emblem of his doctrine, which now is dispersed all the world over."

For aught we know, the upper part of this stream may justify its name.

The two streams unite in that green vale over which Dr. Arnold used to gaze in humorous despair. "It is no wonder," he said, "we do not like looking that way, when one considers that there is nothing fine between us and the Ural Mountains;" and, in a letter to Archbishop Whately, ". . . . . we have no hills, no plains, not a single wood, and but one single copse; no heath, no down, no rock, no river,

RUGBY FROM BROWNSOVER MILL

no clear stream, scarcely any flowers—for the lias is particularly poor in them—nothing but one endless monotony of enclosed fields and hedge-row trees;" lastly, "I care nothing for Warwickshire, and am in it like a plant sunk in the ground in a pot; my roots never strike beyond the pot, and I could be transplanted at any moment without tearing or severing my fibres." And we consent, in part, for the fibres of great men lie in their work, not in this or that soil. But what fibres—not his own—were cracked when Rugby lost



AVON INN, RUGBY

its great schoolmaster we feel presently as, haunted by his son's noble elegy, we stand before the altar of the school chapel, where he rests.

At Rugby our narrative, hitherto smilingly pastoral, quickens to epic. So far we had followed Avon afoot, but here we meant to launch a Canadian canoe on its waters, creating a legend. She lay beside a small river-side tavern, her bright basswood sides gleaming in the sunshine. A small crowd had gathered, and was being addressed with volubility by a high complexioned man of urbane demeanor.

He was bareheaded and coatless; he was shod in blue carpet slippers, on each of which a yellow anchor (emblem of Hope) was entwined with sprays of the pink convolvulus, typifying (according to P., who is a botanist), "I recognize your worth, and will sustain it by judicious and tender affection." As we launched our canoe and placed our sacks on board, he turned his discourse on us. It breathed the spirit of calm confidence. There were long shallows just below (he said), and an uprooted willow blocking the stream, and three waterfalls, and fences of barbed wire. He enumerated the perils; he was sanguine about each; and ours was the first canoe he ever set eyes on.

We pushed off and waved good-bye. The sun shone in our faces; behind, the voice of confidence shouted us over the first shallow. Our canoe swung round a bend beside a small willow coppice, and we sighed as the kindly crowd was hidden from us.

We turned at the sound of stertorous breathing. A pair of blue slippers came twinkling after us over the meadow. Our friend had fetched a circuit round the coppice, and soon both craft and crew were as babes in his hands. Was it a shallow?—he hounded us over. Was it a willow fallen "ascaunt the brook?"—he drove us under, clambering himself along the trunk, as once Ophelia, and exhorting always. At the foot of the first waterfall he took leave of us, and turned back singing across the fields. He was a good man, but would be obeyed. We learned from him, first, that the art of canoeing has no limits; second, that the "impenetrability of matter" is a discredited phrase; and, after the manner of Bunyan, we called him Mr. Win-by-Will.

By many dense beds of rushes, through which a flock of ducks scattered before us, we dropped down to Newbold on Avon, a pretty village on the hill-side, with green orchards sloping to the stream. By climbing through them and

NEWBOLD UPON AVON

looking due south, you may see the spire of Bilton, where Addison lived for many years. Below Newbold the river tumbles over two waterfalls, runs thence by a line of rush beds to a railway bridge, and so beneath Caldecott's famous spinney, where Tom Brown, East, and the "Madman" sought the kestrel's nest. Many Scotch firs mingle with the beeches of the spinney, and just below them the stream divides, enclosing a small island, and recombines to hold a southward course past Holbrook Court.

Holbrook Court is a gloomy building that looks down its

HOLBROOK COURT

park slope upon a weir, a red-brick mill, and a gloomier farm-house of stone. This farm-house has a history, being all that is left of Lawford Hall, the scene of the once notorious "Laurel-Water Tragedy."

The tale is briefly this: In 1780 Sir Theodosius Boughton, a vicious and sickly boy, was squiring it at Lawford Hall, and fast drinking out his puny constitution. "To him enter" an evil spirit in the shape of a brother-in-law, an Irish adventurer, one Captain Donellan. This graduate

LAWFORD MILL

in vice took the raw scholar in hand, and with the better will as being next heir to his estates. But it seems that drink and debauchery worked too slowly for the impatient captain, for one evening the wretched boy went to bed, called for his sleeping-draught, and drank the wrong liquid out of the right bottle. And as for Captain Donellan, he bungled matters somehow, and was hanged at Warwick in the following spring—an elegant, well-mannered man in black, who displayed much ceremonious punctilio at ascending the scaffold ahead of the sheriff. Ten years later

Lawford Hall was pulled down as an accursed thing, and the building before us is all that survives of it. To-day the Gloire de Dijon rose, the jasmine, and the ivy sprawl up its sad-colored walls and over the porch, which still wears the date 1604.

Either at Lawford Hall, or just above, at the old Holbrook Grange, lived, in Elizabeth's time, One-handed Boughton, who won an entirely posthumous fame by driving a ghostly coach and six about the country-side. His spirit was at length caught in a phial by certain of the local clergy, corked down, sealed, thrown into a neighboring marl-pit, and so laid forever. Therefore his only successes of late have been in frightening maid-servants out of their situations at the farm.

Leaving Lawford, we paddle through a land pastorally desolate, seeing, often for miles together, neither man's face nor woman's. The canoe darts in and out of rush beds; avoids now a shallow, now a snag, a clump of reeds, a conglomerate of logs and pendent shrivelled flags, flotsam of many floods; and again is gliding easily between meadows that hold, in Touchstone's language, "no assembly but horn beasts." Our canoe wakes strange emotions in these cattle. They lift their heads, snort, fling up their heels, and, with rigid tails, come capering after us like so many bacchanals. At length a fence stops them, and they obligingly watch us out of sight. The next herd repeats the performance. And always the river is vocal beside us,

> "Giving a gentle kiss to every sedge
> He overtaketh in his pilgrimage;"

while ahead the water-rat dives, or the moor-hen splashes from one green brim to another; and around the land is slowly changing from the monotonous to the "up-and-down-hilly;" and we, passing through it all, are thankful.

A small cottage appears beside some lime-pits on the right bank. Over its garden gate a blackboard proclaims that here are the "Newnham Regis Baths." A certain Walter Bailey, M.D., writing in 1587 A Brief Discourse of Certain Baths, etc., sings loud praise of these waters, but warns drinkers to "consist in a mediocrity, and never to adventure to drink above six, or at the utmost eight, pints in one day." Also, he "will not rashly counsel any to use them in the leap-years." We disregarded this latter warning, but observed the former; yet the plain man who gave us our glassful asserted that a friend of his, "all hot and sweaty," drank two quarts of the water one summer day, and took no harm. As a fact, the springs which here rise from the limestone were known and esteemed by the Romans; the remains of their baths were found, and the present one—a pump within a square paling—built on the same spot. But their fame has not travelled of late.

We embarked again, and were soon floating down to Church Lawford. What shall be said of this spot? As we saw it happily, one slope of green—vivid, yet in shadow—swelled up to darker elms and a tall church tower, set high against an amber sunset. Beyond, the sky and the river's dim reaches melted together, through all delicate yellows, mauves, and grays, into twilight. A swan, scurrying down

CHURCH LAWFORD

stream before us, broke the water into pools of gold. And so a bend swept Church Lawford out of our sight and into our kindliest memories.

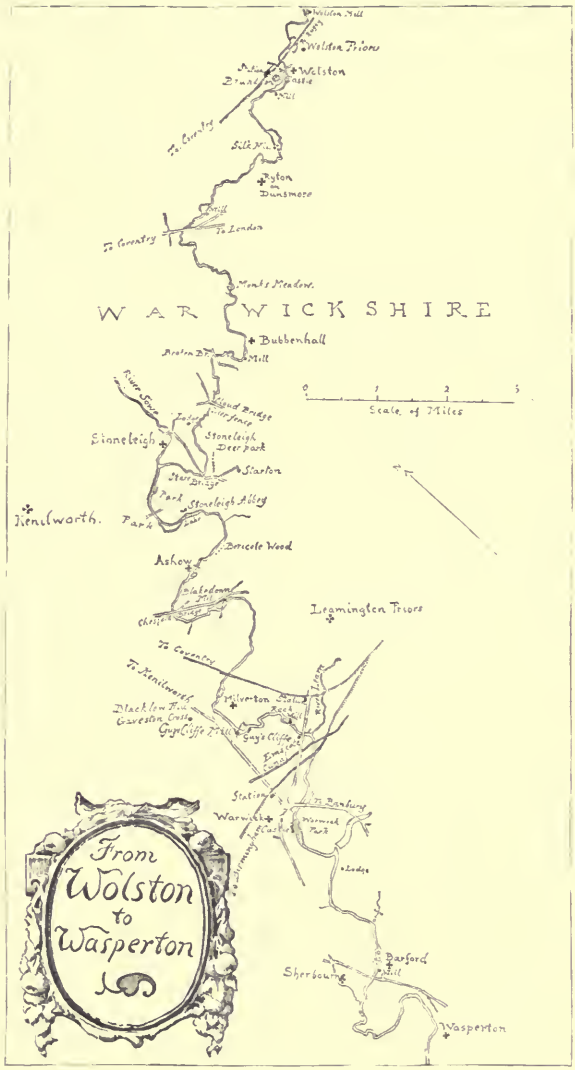
Nearly opposite lies Newnham Regis, about a mile from its baths. In Saxon times, they say, a king's palace stood

RUINS OF NEWNHAM REGIS CHURCH

here; and three large fish-ponds, with some mounds, remain for a sign of it. Here, beside a pleasant mill, the foot-path crosses to Church Lawford. Just below, the stream is blocked by an osier bed; and we struggled there for the half of one mortal hour, and mused on the carpet slippers, and Hope, and such things; and "late and at last" were out and paddling through the uncertain light under the pointed arches of Bretford Bridge.

Here crosses the second great Roman road, the Fosseway,

> "that tilleth from Toteneys
> From the one end of Cornewaile anon to Cateneys,
> From the South-west to North-est, into Englonde's ende.
> *Fosse* men callith thilke way, that by mony town doth wende."


Wolston Mill
Wolston Priory
Wolston
Castle
Mill
To Coventry
Silk Mill
Ryton
Dunsmore
Mill
To London
To Coventry
Monks Meadow
WARWICKSHIRE
Bubbenhall
Mill
River Sowe
Ligud Bridge
Stoneleigh
Stoneleigh Deer park
Starton
Park
Stoneleigh Abbey
Kenilworth.
Park
Bericote Wood
Ashow
Blakedown Mill
Chesfield
Leamington Priors
To Coventry
To Kenilworth
Milverton
Blacklow Hill
Gaveston Cross
Guy's Cliffe Mill
Guy's Cliffe
Emscote
Station
To Banbury
Warwick
Warwick Park
Lodge
Barford
Mill
Sherbourne
Wasperton
0 1 2 3
Scale of Miles
From Wolston to Wasperton

Thenceforward for a mile we move in darkness over glimmering waters, until a railway bridge looms ahead, and we spy, half a mile away, the lights of a little station. This must be Brandon, we decide; and running in beside the bank, begin a quick contention with the echo.

Voices answer us, male and female, and soon many villagers are about us, peering at the canoe.

"Are we in time for the last train to Coventry?"

Chorus answers "Yes;" only one melancholy stripling insists that it isn't likely.

And he is right. We hear a rumble; a red eye flames out; the last train, with a hot trail of smoke, comes roaring

BRETFORD

over the bridge and shoots into Brandon station. We are too late.

"Beds?"

The melancholy one echoes: "Beds! In Brandon?"

"The inn?"

"Well, you might try the inn."

We march up to try the inn. There are forty-four men in the bar, as we have leisure to count, and all are drinking beer. Clearly we are not wanted. The landlady has eyes like beads, black and twinkling, but they will not rest on us. The outlook begins to be sombre, when P., who, beneath a rugged exterior, hides much aptitude for human affairs, announces that he has a way with landladies, and tries it. He says:

"Can we have a horse and trap to take us to Coventry to-night? No? That's bad. Nor a bed? Dear me! Then please draw us half a pint of beer."

The beer is brought. P. tastes it, looks up with a happy smile, and begins again:

"Can we have a horse and trap?" etc., etc.

It is astounding, but at the tenth repetition of this formula the landlady becomes as water, and henceforth we have our way with that inn.

Moreover, we have the landlord's company at supper—a deliberate, heavy man, who tells us that he brews his own beer, and has twenty-three children. He adds that the former distinction has given him many friends, the latter many relatives. A niece of his is to be married at Coventry to-morrow.

Q., who ran into Coventry by an early train next morning to fetch some letters that awaited us, was fortunate enough to catch a glimpse of the bride as she stepped into her carriage. He reported her to be pretty, and we wished her all happiness. P. meanwhile had strolled up the river to Wolston Mill, which we had passed in the darkness, and he too had praises to chant of that, and of a grand old Elizabethan farm-house that he had found outside the village.

We embarked again by Brandon Castle, the abode once of a Roman garrison, and later of an exclusive Norman

family that kept its own private gallows at Bretford, just above. Where the castle stood now thrive the brier, the elder, the dogrose, the blackthorn twined with clematis; the outer moat is become a morass, choked with ragwort and the flowering rush; the inner moat is dry, and a secular ash sprawls down its side. We left it to glide beneath a graceful Georgian bridge; past a lawn dotted with sleek cattle, a small red mill, a row of melancholy anglers, a mile of giant alders, and so down to Ryton-on-Dunsmore, the western outpost of the great heath. As the heath ended, the country's character began to change, and all grew open.

SITE OF BRANDON CASTLE

On either hand broad pastures divided us from the arable slopes where a month ago the gleaners were moving amid

"Summer's green, all girded up in sheaves;"

and therefore by Ryton's two mills and Ryton's many alders we moved slowly, inviting our souls, careless of Fate, that lay in her ambush, soon to harry us. A broad road crossed above us, and, alighting, we loitered by the bridge, and discovered a mile-stone that marks eighty-seven miles from London and three from Coventry. We could descry the three

RYTON-ON-DUNSMORE

lovely spires of Lady Godiva's town, mere needle-points above the trees to northward.

It was but shortly after that we came on an agreeable old gentleman, who stood a-fishing with a little red float, and lied in his teeth, smiling on us and asserting that Bubbenhall (where we had a mind to lunch) was but a mile below.

WOLSTON PRIORY

A mile!—for a crow, perhaps, but not for proper old gentlemen, and most surely not for Avon. The freakish stream went round and round, all meanders

GLEANERS

with never a forthright, narrowing, shallowing, casting up here a snag and there a thicket of reeds. And round and round for miles our canoe followed it, as a puppy chases his own tail; yet Bubbenhall was not, nor any glimpse of Bubbenhall.

Herodotus, if we remember, tells of a village called Is beside the Tigris, far above Babylon, at which all voyagers down the river must put up on three successive nights, so curiously is the channel looped about it. Nor, after twice renewing our acquaintance with one particular guelder-rose bush, did we see our way to doubt the tale when we recalled it that day.

These windings above Bubbenhall have their compensations, keeping both hand and eye amusedly alert as our canoe tacks to and fro, shooting down the V of two shallows, or running along quick water beneath the bank, brushing the forget-me-nots (the flower that Henry of Bolingbroke wore into exile from the famous lists of Coventry, hard by), or parting curtain after curtain of reeds to issue on small vistas that are always new. And Bubbenhall is worth the pains to find—a tiny village of brick and timber set amid elms on a quiet slope, where for ages "bells have knolled to church" from the old brick-buttressed tower above. Below sleeps a quaint mill, also of brick and timber, and from its weir the river wanders northeast, then southeast, and runs to Stoneleigh Deer Park.

A line of swinging deer fences hangs under the bridge, the river trailing between their bars. We push cautiously under them, and look to right and left in amazement. A moment has translated us from a sluggish brook, twisting between water-plants and willows, to a pleasant river, stealing by wide lawns, by slopes of bracken, by gigantic trees—oaks, Spanish oaks, and wych-elms, stately firs, sweet chestnuts, and filmy larch coppices. We are in Arden, the land

of Rosalind and Touchstone, of Jaques and Amiens. Their names may be French, English, what you will, but here they inhabit, and almost we look to spy the suit of motley and listen for its bells, or expect a glimpse of Corin's crook moving above the ferns, Orlando's ballads fluttering on a chestnut, or the sad-colored cloak of Jaques beneath an oak —such an oak as this monster, thirty-nine feet around— whose "antique root" writhes over the red-sandstone rock

IN STONELEIGH DEER PARK

down to the water's brim. The very bed of Avon has altered. He runs now over smooth slabs of rock, and now he brawls by a shallow, and now,

> "where his fair course is not hindered,
> He makes sweet music with the enamell'd stones."

Down to the shallow ahead of us—their accustomed ford—a herd of deer comes daintily and splashes across, first the bucks, then the does in a body. If they are here, why not their masters, the men and women whom we know? We disembark, and letting the canoe drift brightly down stream,

BUBBENHALL

stroll along the bank beside it, and "fleet the time carelessly," as they did in that golden world.

Too soon we reach the beautiful sandstone bridge, tinted by time and curtained with creepers, that divides the deer park from the home park; and soon, beside an old oak, the size of Avon is almost doubled by junction with the Sowe, a stream that comes winding past Stoneleigh village on our right, and brings for tribute the impurities of Coventry. The banks beside us are open no longer; but for recompense we have the birds—the whir-r-r of wood-pigeons in the nigh willow copse, the heron sailing high, the kingfisher sparkling before us, the green woodpecker condensing a whole day's brilliance on his one small breast, the wild-duck, the splashing moor-hen, and water-fowl of rarer kinds —that tell us we are nearing Stoneleigh Abbey.

The abbey was founded in 1154 by Henry II. for a body of Cistercian monks, and endowed with privileges "very many and very great, to wit, free warren, infangthef, outfangthef, wayfs, strays, goods of felons and fugitives, tumbrel, pillory, sok, sak, tole, team, amercements, murders, assize of bread and beer; with a market and fair in the town of Stoneleigh"—a comprehensive list, as it seems. There were, says Dugdale, in the manor of Stoneleigh, at this time, "sixty-eight villains and two priests; as also four bondmen or servants, whereof each held one messuage, and one quatrone of land, by the services of making the gallows and hanging of thieves; every one of which bondmen was to wear a red clout betwixt his shoulders, upon his upper garment." The original building was burnt in 1245, and what little old work now remains belongs to a later building. The abbey went the way of its fellows under Henry VIII.; was granted to Charles Brandon, Duke of Suffolk; changed hands once or twice; and was finally bought by Sir Thomas Leigh, alderman of London, in Queen Eliza-

beth's reign. The present Ionic mansion, now the home of Lord Leigh, his descendant, was built towards the close of the last century. The river spreads into a lake before it, and then, after passing a weir, speeds briskly below a wood-

STONELEIGH ABBEY, OCT. 15, 1884

ed bank, with tiny rapids, down which our canoe dances gayly. As twilight overtakes us we reach Ashow.

A little weather-stained church stands by Ashow shore—a church, a yew-tree, and a narrow graveyard. Close under it steals the gray river, whispers by cottage steps where a crazy punt lies rotting, by dim willow aits and eel bucks, and so passes down to silence and the mists. Seeing all

ASIOM

this, we yearn to live here and pass our days in gratuitous melancholy.

We revisited Ashow next morning, and were less exacting. And the reason was, that it rained. Indeed, we were soaked to the skin before paddling a mile; and as for the canoe,

> "Too much of water hast thou, poor Ophelia,
> And therefore I forbid my tears."

We passed, like Mrs. Haller's infant, "not dead, but very wet," under old Chesford Bridge, whereby the road runs to Kenilworth, that lies two miles back from the river, and shall therefore, for once in its history, escape description; and from Chesford Bridge reached Blakedown Mill and another old bridge beside the miller's house. This "simply

CHESFORD BRIDGE

elegant form of landscape" led Samuel Ireland to ask "why man should with such eager and restless ambition busy himself so often in the smoke and bustle of populous cities, and lose his independence and too often his peace in the pursuit of a phantom which almost eludes his grasp, little thinking that with the accumulation of wealth he must

create imaginary wants, under which, perhaps, that wealth melts away as certainly as under the more ready inlet of inordinate passion happiness is sacrificed." We infer that Mr. Samuel Ireland was never rained upon hereabouts.

Just below, on the north bank, rises Blacklow Hill, whither, on the 19th of June, 1312, Piers Gaveston, the favorite of King Edward II., was marched out from Warwick Castle by the barons to meet his doom. His head was struck off,

BLAKEDOWN MILL

and, rolling down into a thicket, was picked up by a "friar preacher" and carried off in his hood. On the rock beside the scene of that grim revenge this inscription was rudely cut: "P. GAVESTON, EARL OF CORNWALL, BEHEADED HERE + 1312;" and to-day a simple cross also marks the spot.

Hence, by the only rocks of which Avon can boast—and these are of softest sandstone, their asperities worn all away by the weather—we wind beneath Milverton village, with its odd church tower of wood, to the weir and mill of Guy's Cliffe.

The beauties of this spot have been bepraised for centuries. Leland speaks of them; Drayton sings them.

GUY'S CLIFFE MILL

GUY'S CLIFFE

"There," says Camden, "have yee a shady little wood, cleere and cristal springs, mossie bottoms and caves, medowes alwaies fresh and greene, the river rumbling heere and there among the stones with his streame making a milde noise and gentle whispering, and, besides all this, solitary and still quietness, things most grateful to the Muses." Fuller, who knew it well, calls it "a most delicious place, so that a man in many miles' riding cannot meet so much variety as there one furlong doth afford." The water-mill is mentioned in Domesday-book, and has been sketched constantly ever since—a low, quaint pile, fronted by a recessed open gallery, under which the water is forever sparkling and frothing, fresh from its spin over the mill-wheels, or tumble down the ledges of the weir.

And below this mill rises the famous cliff, hollowed with many caves, in one of which lived Guy of Warwick, slayer of the Dun Cow, of lions, dragons, giants, paynims, and all such cattle; who married the fair Phyllis of Warwick Castle; who afterwards repented of his much bloodshed, and trudged

on foot to Palestine by way of expiation; who anon returned again on foot to Warwick, where was his home and his dear Phyllis. And coming to his own house door, where his wife was used to feed every day thirteen poor men with her own hand, he stood with the rest, and received bread from her for three days, and she knew him not. So he learned that God's wrath was not sated, and betook him to a fair rocky place beside the river, a mile and more from his town; where, as his words go in the old ballad,

"with my hands I hewed a house
Out of a craggy rock of stone;
And livèd like a Palmer poore
Within that Cave myself alone:

"And daily came to beg my bread
Of Phyllis at my Castle gate;
Not known unto my loving wife,
Who daily mournèd for her mate.

"Till at the last I fell sore sicke,
Yea, sicke so sore that I must die;
I sent to her a ring of golde,
By which she knew me presentlye.

"So she, repairing to the Cave,
Before that I gave up the Ghost,
Herself closed up my dying Eyes—
My Phyllis fair whom I loved most."

His statue stands in the little shrine above the cliff; his arms lie in Warwick Castle; and in the cave over our head is carved a Saxon inscription, which the learned interpret into this: "Cast out, thou Christ, from thy servant this burden."

We pass on by Rock Mill, haunted of many kingfishers; by Emscote Bridge, where the Avon is joined by the Leam, and where Warwick and Leamington have reached out their

arms to each other till they now join hands; by little gardens, each with its punt or home-made boat beside the river steps; by a flat meadow, where the citizens and redcoats from Warwick garrison sit all day and wait for the fish that never bites; and suddenly, by the famous one-span bridge, see Warwick Castle full ahead, its massy foundations growing, as it seems, from the living rock, and Cæsar's glorious tower soaring above the elms where Mill Street ends at the water's brink. Here once crossed a Gothic bridge, carrying the traffic from Banbury. Its central arches are down now; but the bastions yet stand, and form islets for the brier and ivy, and between them the stream swirls fast for the weir and the ancient mill, by which it rushes down into the park. We turn our canoe, and with many a backward look paddle back to the boat-house at Emscote.

Evening has drawn in, and still we are pacing Warwick streets. We have seen the castle; have gazed from the armory windows upon the racing waters, steep terraces, and gentle park below; have climbed Guy's Tower and seen far beneath us, on the one side, broad cedars and green lawns where the peacocks strut; on the other, the spires,

OLD BRIDGE, WARWICK

towers, sagged roofs, and clustering chimneys of the town; have sauntered down Mill Street; have marvelled in the Beauchamp Chapel as we conned its gorgeous tombs and

CÆSAR'S TOWER, WARWICK CASTLE

canopies and traceries; have loitered by Lord Leycester's Hospital and under the archway of St. James's Chapel. Clearly we are but two grains of sand in the hour-glass of

The Hospital of Robert Earl of Leicester in Warwick
AR

this slow mediæval town. Our feet, that will to-morrow be hurrying on, tread with curious impertinence these everlasting flints that have rung with the tramp of the King-maker's armies, of Royalist and Parliamentarian, horse and foot, drum and standard, the stir of royal and episcopal visits, of mail-coach, market, and assize. But meanwhile our joints are full of pleasant aches and stiffness, our souls of lofty imaginings. As our tobacco smoke floats out on the moonlight we can dwell, we find, with a quite kingly serenity on the transience of man's generations; nay, as we sit down to dinner at our inn we touch the high contemplative, yet careless, mood of the gods themselves.

BARFORD BRIDGE

IT was a golden morning as we left Warwick, and with slow feet followed Avon down through the park towards Barford Bridge, where our canoe lay ready for us. The light, too generously spread to dazzle, bathed the castle towers, lay on the terraces, where the peacocks sunned themselves, and on the living rock below them, where the river washes. Only on the weir it fell in splashes, scattered through the elms' thick foliage. At the water's brim, below Mill Street, stood a man with a pitcher—a stranger to us—who took our farewells with equable astonishment. The stream slackened its hurry, and, keeping pace with our regrets, loitered by the garden slopes, by the great cedars that the Crusaders brought from Lebanon, among reeds and alder-bushes and under tall trees, to the lake, where a small tributary comes tumbling from Chesterton.

The land, as we went on, was full of morning sounds—the ring of a wood-feller's axe, the groaning of a timber-wagon through leafy roads, the rustle of partridges, the note of a stray blackbird in the hedge, and in valleys unseen the tune of hounds cub-hunting—

> "matched in mouth like bells,
> Each unto each."

WARWICK CASTLE, FROM THE PARK

At Barford we met the pack returning, and the sight of them and the huntsman's red coat in the village street was pleasant as a remembered song.

Barford village has produced a well-known man of our time, Mr. Joseph Arch, who here began his efforts to better the condition of the agricultural laborer. If without honor, he is not without influence in his own country, to judge by the neat cottages and trim gardens beside the road. Roses love the rich clay, and roses of all kinds thrive here, from the Austrian brier to the Gloire de Dijon. It was late in the season when we passed, but many clusters lingered under the cottager's thatch, and field and hedge also spoke of past plenty.

By Barford Bridge, where a dumpy, water-logged punt just lifted her stern and her pathetic name (the Dolly Dobs) above the surface, we launched our canoe again. The stream here is shallow and the current fast, with a knack of swinging you round a gravelly corner and tilting you at the high scooped-out bank on the other side. So many and abrupt are these bends that the slim spire of Sherborne across the meadows appeared now to right, now to left; now dodged behind us, now stood up straight ahead. Out of the water-plants at one corner rose a brace of wild-duck, and sailed away with the sun gleaming on their iridescent necks. We followed them with our eyes, and grew aware that the country was altered. Sometimes, near Warwick, we had longed to exchange tall hedge-rows and heavy elms for "an acre of barren ground, ling, heath, brown furze, anything," as Gonzalo says. Now we had full air and a horizon. We had the flowers, too — the forget-me-not, the willow-herb, and meadowsweet (though long past their prime), the bright yellow tansy, and the loosestrife, with a stalk growing blood-red as its purple bloom dropped away. Just above Wasperton we came on a young woman in a boat. She had been

gathering these flowers by the armful, and, having piled the bows with them, made a taking sight; and, being ourselves not without a certain savage beauty, we did not hesitate to believe our pleasure reciprocated.

A steep grassy bank runs beside the stream at Wasper-

SHERBORNE

ton, concealing the village. Many nut-trees grow upon it, and upon it also were ranged six anglers, who caught no fish as we passed. No high-road goes through the village above; but, climbing the bank, we found a few old timbered cottages, and alone, in the middle of a field, a curious dovecote, that must be seen to be believed. It was empty, for the pigeons were all down by the river among the gray willows on the farther shore, and our canoe stole by too softly to disturb their cooing.

A short way below, Hampton Wood rises on a bold eminence to the right, where once Fulbroke Castle stood. The "steep uphill" is now dotted with elders, and tenanted only by "earth-delving conies;" for the castle was destroyed and its land disparked in Henry VIII.'s time, the materials

being carried up to build Compton-Winyates, that beautiful and quiet mansion in a hollow of the Edge Hills where Charles I. slept on the night before Kineton (Edgehill) battle. The park passed in time to a Lucy of Charlcote, and the name reminds us that we are in Shakespeare's country. In fact, we have reached the very place where Shakespeare did *not* steal the deer.

To shed a tear in passing this hallowed spot was but a

AT WASPERTON

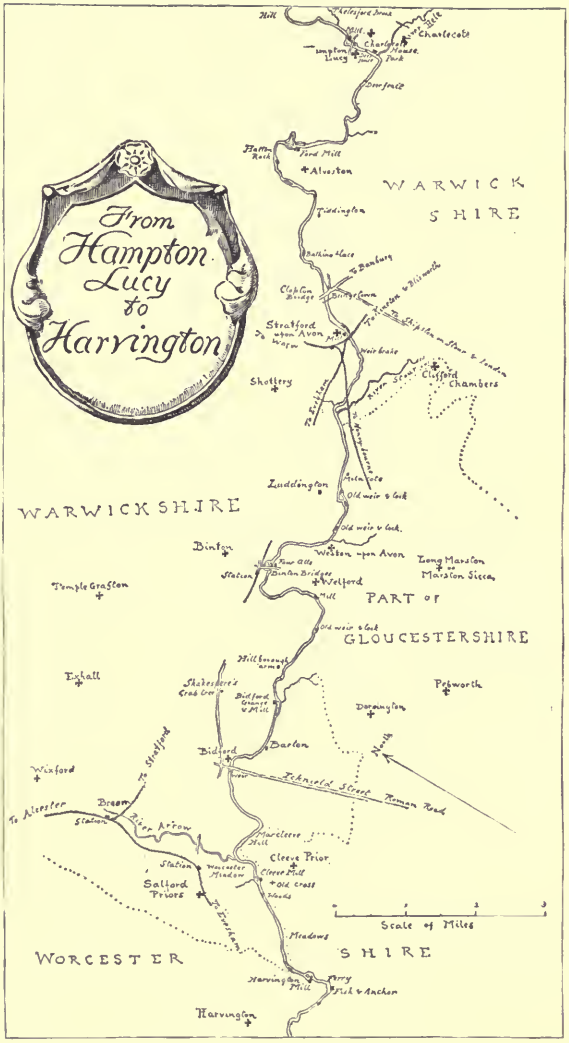
natural impulse; nor, on reading the emotions which Mr. Samuel Ireland squandered here, did we grudge the tribute. "If," he writes, "the story of this youthful frolic is

founded on truth, as well as that Sir Thomas Lucy's rigorous conduct subsequent to this supposed outrage really proved the cause of our Shakespeare's quitting this his native retirement to visit the capital, it will afford us the means of contemplating, at least in one instance, with some degree of complacency even the imperious dominion of our feudal superiors, the tyranny of magistracy, and the harshest enforcement of the remnant of our forest laws; since in their consequences they unquestionably called into action the energies of that sublime genius, and of those rare

DOVE-COTE, WASPERTON

and matchless endowments which had otherwise perhaps been lost in the shade of retirement, and have 'wasted their sweetness on the desert air.'"

The river spread out as it swept round the base of Hampton Wood, and took us to Hampton Lucy. Here is a beautiful modern church, in the worst sense of the words, and beside it a village green, where, as we passed, the villagers were keeping harvest-home. Lo! many countrymen in wheelbarrows, and others, with loins girded, trundling them madly towards a goal, where a couple of brand-new spades


From Hampton Lucy to Harrington
Charlecote
Hampton Lucy
Deerfoulds
Ford Mill
Alveston
WARWICK SHIRE
Tiddington
Bathing Place
Clopton Bridge
Stratford upon Avon
Weir brake
Clifford Chambers
Shottery
Luddington
Old weir & lock
WARWICK SHIRE
Binton
Weston upon Avon
Long Marston
Marston Sicca
Temple Grafton
Welford
PART OF
GLOUCESTERSHIRE
Exhall
Pebworth
Dorsington
Bidford
Barton
Wixford
Bream
Station
River Arrow
Marcleeve Hill
Cleeve Prior
Cleeve Mill
Old Cross
Salford Priors
Scale of Miles
Meadows
WORCESTER SHIRE
Harvington Mill
Ferry
Fish & Anchor
Harvington

were to reward the first-comers. Lo! also, Chloe, Lalage, and Amaryllis, emulous for their swains, lifted exhorting voices; and the oldest inhabitants "a-sunning sat" in the pick of the seats, and discussed the competitors on their merits. It was with regret that we tore ourselves away from these Arcadian games. The sounds of merrymaking followed us through the trees as we dropped down to Charlcote, just below,

> "Where Avon's Stream, with many a sportive Turn,
> Exhilarates the Meads, and to his Bed
> Hele's gentle current wooes, by Lucy's hand
> In every graceful Ornament attired,
> And worthier, such, to share his liquid Realms."

So writes the Rev. Richard Jago, M.A., a local poet of the last century, in "Edgehill; or, The Rural Prospect Delineated and Moralized. A Poem in Four Books, printed for J. Dodsley in Pall Mall, 1767;" and though the bard's language is more flowery than Avon's banks, it shall stand.

HAMPTON LUCY, FROM THE MEADOWS

We had amused ourselves on the voyage by choosing and rechoosing the spot whither we should some day return and pass our declining years. P. (who has high thoughts now and then) had been all for Warwick Castle, Q. for Ashow, and the merits of each had been hotly wrangled over. But we shook hands over Charlcote.

Less stately than Stoneleigh, less picturesque than Guy's Cliffe, less imposing than Warwick Castle, Charlcote is lovelier and more human than any. The red-brick Elizabethan house stands on the river's brink. From the geranium beds on its terrace a flight of steps leads down to the water, and over its graceful balustrade, beside the little leaden statuettes, you may lean and feed the swans just below. Across the stream, over the fern-beds and swelling green turf, are dotted the antlers of the Charlcote deer, red and fallow; yonder "Hele's gentle current" winds down from the Edge Hills; to your right, the trees part and give a glimpse only of Hampton Lucy church; behind you rise the peaked gables, turrets, and tall chimneys of the house, projecting and receding, so that from whatever quarter the sun may strike there is always a bold play of light and shade on the soft-colored bricks.

The house was built by Sir Thomas Lucy in the first year of Queen Elizabeth's reign; and in compliment to his queen, who paid Charlcote a visit not long after, the knight built on the side which turns from the river an entrance porch which, abutting between two wings, gives the form of an E. This porch leads to the queer gate-house, whence, between an avenue of limes, you reach Charlcote church—a sober little pile beside the high-road, and just outside the rough-split oak palings of the park. It holds the monuments of Sir Thomas Lucy and his wife, and in praise of the latter an epitaph worth remembering for the tender simplicity of its close:

> "Set down by him that best did know
> What hath been written to be true.—Thomas Lucy."

In the graveyard outside is a plain stone to a lesser pair —John Gibbs, aged 81, and his wife, aged 55—who are made to say, somewhat cynically:

CHARLCOTE

"Farewell, proud, vain, false, treacherous world, we have seen enough of thee;
We value not what thou canst say of we."

One marvels how in this sheltered corner John Gibbs found the world's breath so rude.

On the other hand, upon Sir Thomas Lucy the world has been hard indeed, identifying him with Justice Shallow.

MEADOWSWEET

His portrait hangs in the hall where Shakespeare was not tried for deer-stealing. Isaac Oliver painted it; and though men have forgotten Isaac Oliver, yet will we never, for he was a master. The knight's embroidered robe is right Holbein; but the knight's subtle, beautiful face is more.

It teaches with convincing sincerity what manner of being a gentleman was in "the spacious days of great Elizabeth;" and the lesson is the more humiliating because men have during three centuries accepted the coarse mask of Justice Shallow for the truth.

The house holds many fine paintings; notably a Titian, "Samson and the Lion," that rests against the yellow silk hangings of the drawing-room, and is worth a far pilgrimage to see; and a Velasquez, set (immoderately high) above the library book-shelves. So that too soon we were out in the sunlight again and paddling down to Alveston.

We floated by flat meadows, islands of sedge, long lines of willows; by "the high bank called Old Town, where, perhaps, men and women, with their joys and sorrows, once abided;" but now the rabbits only colonize it, under the quiet alders; by Alveston, where we found boats, and a boat-house covered with "snowball" berries; by the mill and its weeping-willows; and below, by devious loops, to Hatton Rock, that the picnickers from Stratford know—a steep bank of marl covered with hawthorn, hazel, elder, and trailing knots of brambles. In June this is a very flowery spot. The slope is clothed with creamy elder blossoms, and on the river's bank opposite are wild rose-bushes dropping their petals, pink and white, on forget-me-nots, wild blue geranium, and meadow-rue. Over its stony bed the current, in omne volubilis ævum, keeps for our dull ears the music that it made for Shakespeare, if we could but hear. For somewhere along these banks the Stratford boy spied the Muse's naked feet moving.

> "O mistress mine, where are you roaming?
> O stay and hear; your true love's coming,
> That can sing both high and low."

And somewhere he came on her, and coaxed the secret of

UNDER THE WILLOWS

her woodland music. But when that meeting was, and how that secret was given, like a true lover, he will never tell.

"Others abide our questions; thou art free:
We ask and ask; thou smilest and art still."

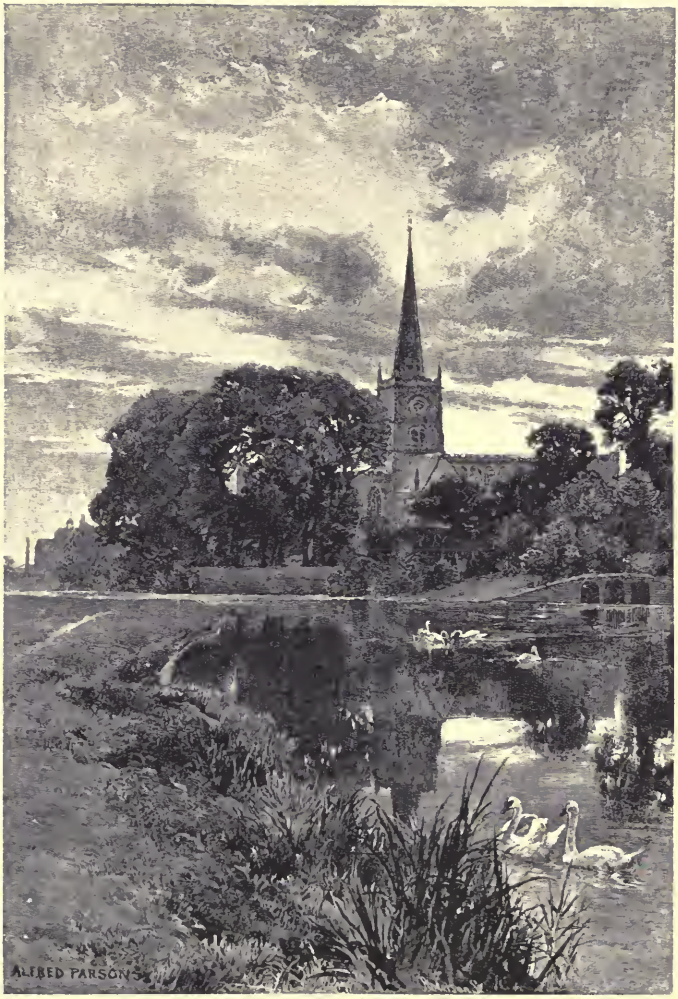
As we paddled down past Tiddington the willows grew closer. Between their stems we could see, far away on our left, the blue Edge Hills; and to the right, above the Warwick road, a hill surmounted by an obelisk. This is Welcome, and behind it lies Clopton House, a former owner of which, Sir Hugh Clopton, Lord Mayor of London, built in the reign of Henry VII. the long stone bridge of fourteen Gothic arches just above Stratford. In a minute or two we had passed under this bridge and were floating down beside the Memorial Theatre, the new Gardens, and the brink of Shakespeare's town.

A man may take pen and ink and write of a place as he

THE CLOPTON BRIDGE, STRATFORD-UPON-AVON

will, and the page will, likely enough, be a pretty honest index to his own temperament. But never will it do for another man's reliance. So let it be confessed that for a day we searched Stratford streets, and found nothing of the Shakespeare that we sought. Neither in the famous birthplace in Henley Street—restored "out of all whooping," crammed with worthless mementos, and pencilled over with inconsiderable names; nor in the fussy, inept Memorial Theatre; nor in the New Place, where certain holes, protected with wire gratings, mark what may have been the foundations of Shakespeare's house: in none of these could we find him. His name echoed in the market-place, on the lips of guide and sightseer, and shone on monuments, shops, inns, and banking-houses. His effigies were everywhere—in photographs, in statuettes; now doing duty as a tobacco-box (with the bald scalp removable), now as a trade-mark for beer. And even while we despised these things the fault was ours. All the while the colossus stood high above, while we "walked under his huge legs and peep'd about," too near to see.

Nor until we strolled over the meadows to Ann Hathaway's cottage at Shottery did understanding come with the quiet falling of the day. Rarely enough, and never, perhaps, but in the while between sunset and twilight, may a man hear the sky and earth breathing together, and, drawing his own small breath ambitiously in tune with them, "feel that he is greater than he knows." But here and at this hour it happened to us that, our hearts being uplifted, we could measure Shakespeare for a moment; could know him for the puissant intelligence that held communion with all earth and sky, and all mortal aspirations that rise between them; and knew him also for the Stratford youth treading this very foot-path beside this sweet-smelling hedge towards those elms a mile away, where the red light lingers,



STRATFORD CHURCH

and the cottage below them, where already in the window Ann Hathaway trims her lamp. You are to believe that our feet trod airily across those meadows. And at the cottage, old Mrs. Baker, last living descendant of the Hathaways, was pleased with our reverent behavior, and picked for each of us at parting a sprig of rosemary from her garden for remembrance. May her memory be as green and as fragrant!

It was easy now to forgive all that before had seemed

ANN HATHAWAY'S COTTAGE

unworthy in Stratford—easy next morning, standing before Shakespeare's monument, while the sunshine, colored by the eastern window, fell on one particular slab within the chancel rails, to live back for a moment to that April morning when a Shakespeare had passed from the earth, and earth "must mourn therefor;" to follow his coffin on its short journey

THE MOUTH OF THE STOUR

from the New Place, between the blossoming limes of the Church Walk, out of the sunlight into the lasting shadow, up the dim nave to this spot; and easy to divine, in the rugged epitaph so often quoted, the man's passionate dread lest his bones might be flung in time to the common charnel-house, the passionate longing to lie here always in this dusky corner, close to his friends and kin and the familiar voices that meant home—the talk of birds in the near elms, the chant of Holy Trinity choir, and, night and day, but a stone's-throw from his resting-place, the whisper of Avon running perpetually.

For even the wayfarer finds Stratford a hard place to part from. And looking back as we left her, so kindly, so full of memories, giving her haunted streets, her elms, and river-side to the sunshine, but guarding always as a mother the shrine of her great son, I know she will pardon my light words.

The river runs beneath the elms of the church-yard to Lucy's Mill and the first locks. On the mill wall are marked the heights of various great floods. The highest is dated at the beginning of this century; just below is the high-water mark of October 25, 1882. Take the level of this with your eye, and you will wonder that any of Strat-

THE LOCK AND CHURCH

ford is left standing; and lower down the river the floods are very serious matters to all who live within their reach. If you disbelieve me, read "John Halifax." "We don't mind them," an old lady told us at Barton, "till the water turns red. Then we know the Stour water is coming down, and begin to shift our furniture." The Arrow, too, that joins the Avon below Bidford, is a great helper of the floods, but rushes down its valley more rapidly than the Stour, and so its flooding is sooner over.

The lock at Stratford is now choked with grass and weed, and the town no longer (to quote the Rev. Richard Jago)

> "Hails the freighted Barge from Western Shores,
> Rich with the Tribute of a thousand Climes."

The Avon, from Tewkesbury to Stratford, was made navigable in 1637 by Mr. William Sandys, of Fladbury, "at his own proper cost." But the railways have ruined the waterways for a time, and Mr. Sandys's handiwork lies in sore decay. Till Evesham be passed we shall meet with no barges, but with shallows, dismantled locks, broken-down

WEIR BRAKE

weirs to be shot, and sound ones to be pulled over that will give us excitement enough, and toil too.

Below the lock we drifted under a hanging copse, the Weir Brake, where a pretty foot-path runs for Stratford lovers. Below it, by a cluster of willows, the Stour comes down; and a little farther yet stands Luddington, where Shakespeare is said to have been married; but the church and its records have been destroyed by fire. From Luddington you spy Weston-upon-Avon, in Gloucestershire, across the river, the tower of its sturdy perpendicular church peering above the elms that hide it from the river-side throughout the summer.

WESTON-UPON-AVON

By Weston our remembrance keeps a picture—a broken lock and weir, an islet or two heavy with purple loosestrife, a swan bathing in the channel between. These were of the foreground. Beyond them, a line of willows hid the flat fields on our right; but on the left rose a steep green slope, topped with poplars and dotted with red cattle; and ahead the red roof of Binton church showed out prettily from the hill-side. As we saw the picture we broke into it, shooting the weir, scaring the swan, and driving her before us to Binton Bridges. By Binton Bridges stands an inn, the Four Alls. On its sign-board, in gay colors, are depicted four figures—the King, the Priest, the Soldier, and the Yeoman; and around them runs this chiming legend:

"Rule all,
Pray all,
Fight all,
Pay all."

We could not remember a place so utterly God-forsaken as this inn beside the bridge, nor a woman so weary of face as its once handsome landlady. She spoke of the inn and its custom in a low, musical voice that caused Q. to rush out into the yard to hide his pity; and there he found a gig, and, sitting down before it, wondered.

Change and decay fill our literature; but we have not explained either. For instance, here was a gig—a soundly built, gayly painted gig. A glance told that it had not been driven a dozen times, that nothing was broken, and that it had been backed into this heap of nettles years ago to rot. It had been rotting ever since. The paint on its sides had blistered, the nettles climbed above its wheels and flourished over its back seat. Still it was a good gig, and the most inexplicable sight that met us on our voyage. Only less desolate than Binton Bridges is Black Cliff, below—a bank covered with crab-trees and thorns and hummocks of sombre grass. It was here that one Palmer, a wife-murderer, drowned his good woman in Avon at the beginning of the century; and the oldest man in Bidford, not far below, remembers seeing a gibbet on the hill-side, with chains and a few bones and rags dangling—all that was left of him. A gate post at the top of the hill on the Evesham road is made of this gibbet, and still groans at night, to the horror of the passing native.

Soon we reach Welford, the second and more beautiful Welford on the river. It stands behind a stiff slope, where now the chestnuts are turning yellow, and the village street is worth following. It winds by queer old cottages set down in plum and apple orchards; by a modern May-

pole; by a little church of stained buff sandstone, with oaken lych-gate and church-yard wall scarcely containing the dead, who already are piled level with its coping; by more queer crazy cottages—and then suddenly melts, ends, disappears in grass. It is as if the end of the world were reached. Of course we wanted to settle down and spend our lives here, but were growing used to the desire by this time, and dragged each other away without serious resistance down to the old mill, where our canoe lay waiting.

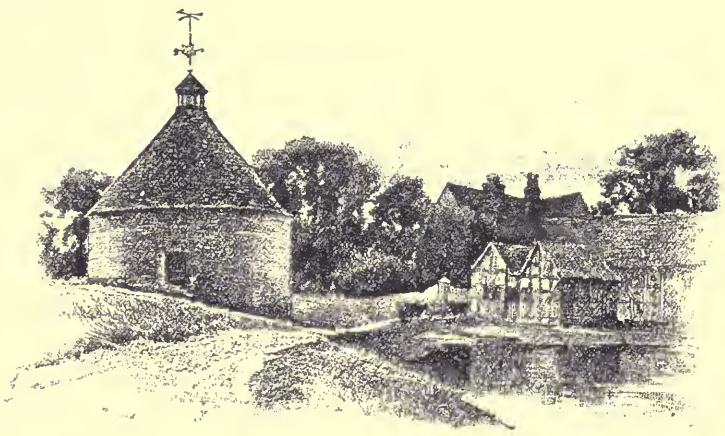
Passing the weir and mill, the river runs under a grassy hill-side, where the trimmed elms give a French look to the

WELFORD WEIR AND CHURCH

landscape. Within sight, in winter, lie the roofs and dovecotes of Hillborough—"haunted Hillbro'," as Shakespeare called it, but nothing definite is known of the ghost. The local tale says that the poet and some boon companions walked over once to a Whitsun ale at the Falcon Inn, Bidford (just below us), to try their prowess in drinking against the Bidford men. They drank so deeply that night that

ELMS BY BIDFORD GRANGE

sleep overtook them before they had staggered a mile on their homeward way, and, lying down under a crab-tree beside the road, they slept till morning, when they were awakened by some laborers trudging to their work. His com-



HILLBOROUGH

panions were for returning and renewing the carouse, but Shakespeare declined.

"No," said he; "I have had enough; I have drinked with

> "Piping Pebworth, dancing Marston,
> Haunted Hillbro', hungry Grafton,
> Dudging Exhall, papist Wixford,
> Beggarly Broom, and drunken Bidford."

"Of the truth of this story," says Mr. Samuel Ireland, "I have little doubt."

"Of its entire falsehood," says Mr. James Thorne, "I have less. A more absurd tale to father upon Shakespeare was never invented, even by Mr. Ireland or his son."

The reader may decide.

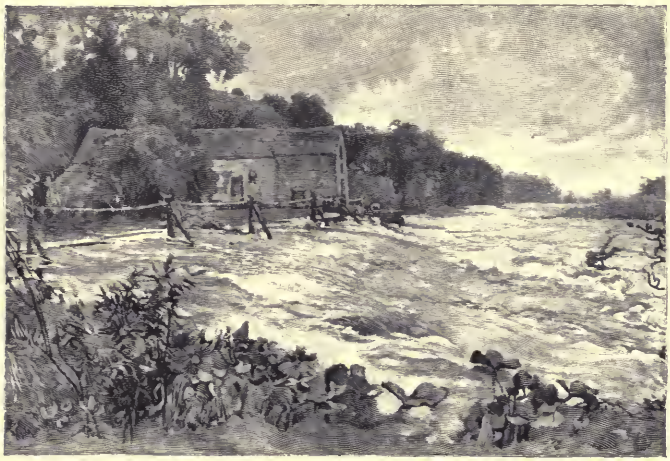
Close by is Bidford Grange, once an important manor-house; and on the left bank of Avon—you may know it by the gray stone dove-cotes—stands Barton, where once dwelt another famous drinker, "Christophero Sly, old Sly's son of Burton heath: by birth a peddler, by education a card-maker, by transmutation a bear-herd, and now by present profession a tinker. Ask Marian Hacket, the fat ale-wife of Wincot, if she know me not: if she say I am not four-teen-pence on the score for sheer ale, score me up for the lyingest knave in Christendom." And from Barton hamlet a foot-path leads across the meadows over the old bridge into Bidford.

You are to notice this bridge, not only because the monks of Alcester built it in 1482, to supersede the ford on the old Roman road which crosses the river here, but for a certain stone in its parapet, near the inn window. This stone is worn hollow by thousands of pocket knives that generations of Bidford men have sharpened upon it. For four centuries it has supplied in these parts the small excuse that men

BIDFORD BRIDGE

OLD THORNS, MARCLEEVE HILL

need to club and lounge together; and of an evening you may see a score, perhaps, hanging by this end of the bridge and waiting their turn, while the clink, clink of the sharpening knife fills the pauses of talk. When at last the stone



CLEEVE MILL—AN AUTUMN FLOOD

shall wear all away there will be restlessness and possibly social convulsions in Bidford, unless its place be quickly supplied.

We lingered only to look at the building that in Shakespeare's time was the old Falcon Inn, and soon were paddling due south from Bidford Bridge. The Avon now runs straight through big flat meadows towards a steep hill-side, with the hamlet of Marcleeve (or Marlcliff) at its foot. This line of hill borders the river on the south for some miles, and is the edge of a plateau which begins the ascent towards the Cotswold Hills. Seen from the river below, this escarpment is full of varying beauty, here showing a bare scar of green and red marl, here covered with long

gray grass and dotted with old thorn and crab trees, here clothed with hanging woods of maple, ash, and other trees, straggled over and smothered with ivy, wild rose, and clematis. By Cleeve Mill, where clouds of sweet-smelling flour issued from the doorway, we disembarked and climbed up between the thorn-trees until upon the ridge we could look back upon the green vale of Evesham, and southward across ploughed fields, and cottages among orchards and elms, to the gray line of the Cotswolds, over which a patch of silver

THE YEW HEDGE—CLEEVE PRIOR MANOR-HOUSE

hung, as the day fought hard to regain its morning sunshine. The narrow footway took us on to Cleeve Priors and through its street—a village all sober, gray, and beautiful. The garden walls, coated with lichen and topped with yellow quinces or a flaming branch of barberry; the tall church tower; the

MEADOWS IN THE AVON

quaintly elaborate grave-stones below it, their scrolls and cherubim overgrown with moss; the clipped yew-trees that abounded in all fantastic shapes; the pigeons wheeling round their dove-cote, and the tall poplar by the manor farm—all these were good; but best of all was the manor farm itself, and the arched yew hedge leading to its Jacobean porch, a marvel to behold. We hung long about the entrance and stared at it. But no living man or woman approached us. The village was given up to peace or sleep or death.

Returning, we paused on the brow of the slope above Avon for a longer look. At our feet was spread the vale of Evesham; the river, bordered with meadows as green and flat as billiard-tables; the stream of Arrow to northward, which rises in the Lickey Hills, and comes down through Alcester to join the Avon here; the villages of Salford Priors and Salford Abbots; farther to the west, among its apple-trees, the roofs and gables of Salford Nunnery, the village of Harvington. And all down the stream, and round the meadows, and in and out of these

> "low farms,
> Poor pelting villages, sheepcotes, and mills,"

are willows innumerable—some polled last year, and looking like green mops, others with long curved branches ready to be lopped and turned into fence poles next winter, until they are lost in the hills round Evesham, where the dim towers stand up and the bold outline of Bredon Hill shuts out the view of the Severn Valley.

The mound on which we are standing is surmounted by the stone socket of an old cross, and beneath the cross are said to lie many of those who fell on Evesham battle-field; for the vale below was on August 4th, 1265, the scene of one of the bloodiest and most decisive conflicts in English history. Simon de Montfort, Earl of Leicester, victor of

Lewes, and champion of the people's rights, was hastening back by forced marches from Wales, having King Henry III. in his train, a virtual hostage. He was hurrying to meet his son, the young Simon, with reinforcements from the southeast; but young Simon's troops had been surprised

HARVINGTON WEIR

by Prince Edward at Kenilworth in the early morning and massacred in their beds, their leader himself escaping with difficulty, almost naked, in a boat across the lake of Kenilworth Castle. Unconscious of their fate, the old earl reached Evesham on Monday, August 3d, and, crossing the bridge into the town, sealed his own doom. For Evesham is a trap. The Avon forms a loop around it, shutting off escape on three sides, while the fourth is blocked by an eminence called the Green Hill. And while yet Simon and his king were feasting and making merry in Evesham Abbey, Edward's troops were crossing the river here at Cleeve Ford in the darkness, and moving on their sure prey.

A strange and horrible darkness lay over the land on that fatal Tuesday morning, shrouding the sun, and hiding their books from the monks of Evesham as they sang in the choir. The soldiers at their breakfast could scarcely

WILLOW POLLARDING

see the meats on the board before them. They were ready to start again; but before the march began, banners and lances and moving troops were spied on the crest of the Green Hill, coming towards the town.

"It is my son," cried Simon; "fear not. But nevertheless look out, lest we be deceived."

Nicholas, the earl's barber, being expert in the cognizance of arms, ascended the bell-tower of the abbey, and soon detected among the friendly banners, that were, in fact, but trophies of the raid at Kenilworth, the "three lions" of Prince Edward and the royalists. The alarm was given,

NEAR OFFENHAM

but it was quickly seen that Simon's army would be utterly outnumbered.

"By the arm of St. James," cried the old warrior, "they come on well! But it was from me," he added, with a touch of soldierly pride—"it was from me they learned it." A glance showed the hopelessness of resisting this array with a handful of horse and a mob of wild Welshmen. "Let us commend our souls to God," he said to his followers, "for our bodies are the foe's."

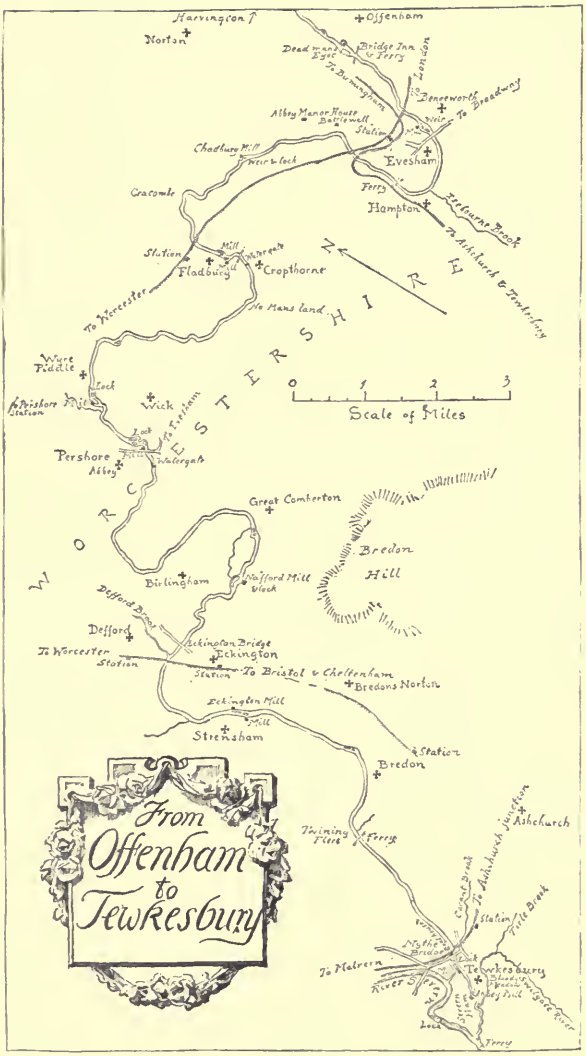
And so he went forth; and while the Welsh fled like sheep at the first onset, cut down in standing corn and

flowery garden, the old warrior of sixty-five hewed his way "like an impregnable tower" to the top of the Green Hill, until one by one his friends had dropped beside him; then at the summit his horse fell too, and disdaining surrender, hemmed in by twelve knights, he was struck down by a lance wound. "It is God's will," he said, and died. And whilst the butchery went on, and the Welshmen fled homeward through Pershore to Tewkesbury, where the citizens cut them down in the streets, and whilst the darkness broke in drenching rain and blinding lightning, Simon's head was lopped off, and carried on a pole in triumph to Wigmore.

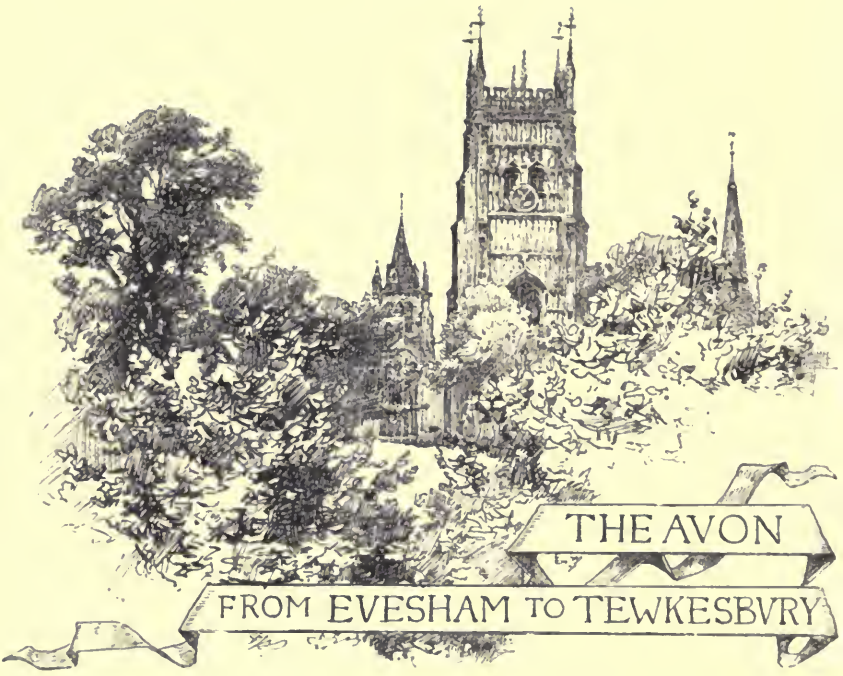
"Such was the murder of Evesham, for battle none it was," sings Robert of Gloucester. And as the sun breaks through and turns the gray day to silver, we pass on either hand memorials of that massacre. By Harvington mill and weir, where the sand-pipers flit before us, and by the spot where now stand the Fish and Anchor Inn and a row of anglers, Edward's soldiery marched down through the night.

EVESHAM, FROM THE RIVER

At Offenham, where now is a Bridge Inn, and where tradition says a bridge once stood, they crossed the river again. On the opposite bank the slaughter was heaviest, and Dead Man Eyot, a small willowy island here, won its


From Offenham to Tewkesbury
Harvington
Offenham
Norton
Dead man's Eyes
Bridge Inn & Ferry
To Birmingham
To London
Beneeworth
To Broadway
Weir
Albey Manor House
Battlewell
Station
Chadbury Mill
Weir & lock
Evesham
Ferry
Cracomb
Hampton
Eschourne Brook
To Ashchurch & Tewkesbury
Station
Mill
Fladbury
Cropthorne
To Worcester
No Mans land
WORCESTERSHIRE
Wure Piddle
Lock
Wick
To Pershore Station
To Evesham
Lock
Pershore
Abbey
Watergate
0 1 2 3
Scale of Miles
Great Comberton
Bredon Hill
Birlingham
Nafford Mill & lock
Defford Brook
Defford
Eckington Bridge
Eckington
To Worcester Station
Station
To Bristol & Cheltenham
Bredons Norton
Eckington Mill
Mill
Strensham
Station
Bredon
Ashchurch
Twining Flere
Ferry
Current Brook
To Ashchurch Junction
Station
Tirle Brook
Mythe Bridge
To Malvern
Lock
Tewkesbury
River Severn
Abbey Pool
Lock
Ferry

name on that day. The sheep are feeding now in that "odd angle of the isle" that then was piled high with corpses. And so we come to a high railway embankment, and thence to a bridge, and the beautiful bell-tower leaps into view, soaring above the mills and roofs of Evesham.



THE AVON
FROM EVESHAM TO TEWKESBURY

TO remember Evesham is to call up a broad and smiling vale; a river looped about a green hill and returning almost on itself; on the lower slope of the hill, beside the river, a little town; and above its mills and roofs, two spires and one pre-eminent tower, all set in the same churchyard.

The vale itself, as we dropped down towards Evesham, was insensibly changing. Unawares we left the pastures behind, and drifted into a land of orchards and market-gardens—no Devonshire orchards, with carpets of vivid grass, but stiff regiments of plum-trees, and between their

files asparagus growing, and sage and winter lettuce under hand-glasses, and cabbages splashed with mauve and crimson. We had crossed, in fact, the frontier of a fruit-growing country that in England has no rival but Kent. The beginnings of this prosperous gardening are sometimes ascribed to one Signor Bernardi, a Genoese gentleman who settled at Evesham in the middle of the seventeenth century.

A MARKET-GARDEN NEAR EVESHAM

But more probably these orchards grow for the same reason that the meadows above are fat and a bell-tower stands in Evesham. There is a legend to that effect which is worth telling.

Egwin, Bishop of Worcester in the year 700 or thereabouts, was a saint of shining piety, but unpopular in his diocese, which had not long been converted from paganism, and retained many "ethnic and uncomely customs." Against these the bishop thundered, till the people seized and haled him before Ethelred, then King of Mercia, charging him with tyranny and many bitter things. The matter was re-

ferred to the Holy Father at Rome, who commanded Egwin to appear before him and answer the charges. So to Rome he went; but before starting, to show how lowly he accounted himself, he ordered a pair of iron horse-fetters, and having put his feet into them, caused them to be locked and the key tossed into the Avon. Thus shackled, he went forward to Dover, took ship, and came to the Holy City; when, lo, a miracle! His attendants had gone down to the Tiber to catch a fish for supper. Scarcely was the line cast when a fine salmon took it and leaped ashore, without a struggle to escape. They hurried home with their prize, opened him, and found inside the key of the bishop's fetters.

It is needless to say that the pope, after this, made short work of the charges against Egwin. The accused was loaded with honors, and sent home with particular recommendations to King Ethelred, who lost no time in restoring the bishop to his see and appointing him tutor to his own sons. Among other marks of friendship the king gave Egwin a large tract of land. It was savage, inhospitable, horrid with thickets and forest trees. Yet Egwin liked it; for he kept pigs, which found abundance of food there. So, dividing the wilderness into four quarters, he appointed a swine-herd over each, whose names were Eoves and Ympa, two brothers; and Trottuc and Carnuc, brothers also. Eoves (with whom alone we are concerned) had charge over the eastern portion, and it happened to him one day that a favorite sow strayed off into the thickest of the woods. Eoves spent weeks in searching after her, and at length wandered so far that he too lost his way. He shouted for succor, but none came. Growing appalled, he began to run headlong through the undergrowth, when suddenly he stumbled on the lost sow, having three young ones with her. She came gladly to his call, grunting and muzzling at his legs; then turned, and began to hurry into the deeper forest, the young pigs

trotting beside her. Eoves followed, and soon, to his wonder, reached a glade, open and somewhat steep, where was a virgin standing, lovelier than the noonday, and two others beside her, celestially robed, having psalteries in their hands and singing holy songs. The swine-herd understood nothing of the vision; but hurrying back, was lucky enough to find an egress from the woods, and returned to his home.

This matter was reported to Egwin; and he, being eager to see the place with his own eyes, was led thither by Eoves. There it was vouchsafed to him to see the same vision, and,

REED-CUTTERS

as it faded, to hear a voice from the chief virgin saying, "This place have I chosen." Whereupon he understood that he, like Æneas, had been guided by a sow to the spot where he must build; and soon the Abbey of Evesham, or Eovesham, began to rise where the virgins had stood. This was in 703, and the building was finished in six years.

Such is the legend. A town sprang up around the monastery; the thickets were cleared and became pasture-lands and orchards; the country smiled, and the abbey waxed rich. It housed sixty-seven monks, five matrons, three poor brothers, three clerks, and sixty-five servants to work in brew-house, bake-house, kitchen, cellar, infirmary; to make clothes and boots; to open the great gate; to till the gardens, vineyards, and orchards; and to fish for eels in the Avon below. When William de Beauchamp, whose castle stood at Bengeworth, on the opposite bank, broke into the abbey church and plundered it, about 1150 A.D., the abbot excommunicated him and his retainers, razed his castle, and made a burial-ground of the site. In 1530, under the rule of Clement Lichfield, the abbey possessed fifteen manors in the county of Worcester alone, in Gloucestershire six, in Warwickshire three, in Northamptonshire two, with lands, rents, and advowsons far and wide. Out of Oxford and Cambridge there was no such assemblage of religious buildings in England. Then Clement Lichfield reared "a right sumptuous and high square tower of stone;" and almost at once King Henry VIII. made his swoop on the monasteries.

EVESHAM BELL-TOWER AND OLD ABBEY GATEWAY

The country still smiles; but to-day of all the conventual buildings there survive but a few stones—a sculptured arch leading to a kitchen-garden, and this "high square tower" of Lichfield's building. This last was designed to be at

once the abbey's gateway, horologe, and belfry; but before the day of its completion all these uses were nullified. Its service since has been monumental merely—to stand over the razed foundations and obliterated fish-ponds of Egwin's house, and speak to the vale of famous men and the hands that made it fertile.

There are many old houses in Evesham, and especially in Bridge Street; but the bridge at the foot of this street is modern, and ascribed "to the public spirit and perseverance

HAMPTON FERRY

of Henry Workman, Esq." To him also are due the "Workman Gardens," a strip of pleasure-ground on the river's left bank, facing the abbey grounds; but local sapience has imposed the usual restrictions on their use, and nine times out of ten you will find them deserted.

The day was almost spent as we took to the canoe once more, and paddled around the long bend that girdles the town. We thought to have left the bell-tower far behind, when, a little past Hampton Ferry, its pinnacles reappeared, and the twin spires of St. Lawrence and All-Saints, peering

above a plum orchard almost ahead of us. On our left the sun sank in a broad yellow haze; the hill where Simon fell, and where stands the Abbey Manor-house, was soaked in it; and soon, as the channel brought our faces westward again, and we drew near Chadbury mill and Chadbury lock and weir, the vale was filled with this yellow light, pale and pervasive.

> "Great Evesham's fertile glebe what tongue hath not extolled?
> As though to her alone belonged the garb of gold,"

sings Drayton; and certainly she wore the garb that evening. As she donned it, the chorus of the birds ceased, and with the sudden hush we became aware that their voices had been following in our ears all the day through. Above and below Evesham every furlong of the river-bank is populous, with larks especially, whose song you may hear shivering from every point of the sky. In early winter the number of nests that the falling leaves disclose is astonishing. Some, no doubt, have lasted, and will last, for years, such as the mud-plastered houses of the blackbird and thrush, and the fagot pile which the magpie constructs in the top of a tree. But the flimsy nests of the warblers and

CHADBURY MILL

CHADBURY WEIR

other late-breeding birds, built of a few dried grasses and bound together with cobwebs and horse-hair, date from last spring, and will disappear before the next. They were not made until the leaves were out, and upon the leaves their builders relied for concealment, so that in winter they hang betrayed. Yet even in winter the banks teem with life and color and interest. P., who rowed down here one bright December morning when the scarlet hips were out, and dark-red haws, and the silver-gray seed of "old man's beard," tells of a big meadow from which the flood had just subsided, and of birds innumerable feeding there—rooks, starlings, pewits in flocks, little white-rumped sandpipers darting to and fro and uttering their sharp note, a dozen herons solemnly but suspiciously observant of the passing boat, and watching for its effect on a cluster of wild-duck out on the ruffled stream. You cannot, indeed, pass down Avon without receiving the wide-eyed attention of its fauna; and politeness calls on you to return it.

Chadbury is twenty miles below Stratford, and here we meet the first lock that is kept in repair; so that for twenty miles Mr. William Sandys's work of making Avon navigable has gone for nothing. He lived at Fladbury, just below, and the money he threw away on his hobby "cannot be reckoned at less than twenty thousand pounds." "As soon," writes Dr. Nash, in his "Worcestershire," "as he had finished his work to Stratford (and, as I have heard, spent all his fortune), he immediately delivered up all to Parliament, to do what they thought fit therein." And this was precisely nothing.

Consequently there is to-day but little human stir beside the Avon. The "freighted barge from distant shores" travels this way no longer, or but rarely. Unless by the towns—Emscote, Stratford, Evesham, and Tewkesbury—a pleasure-boat is hardly to be met, and all the villages seem

to turn their backs on the stream. At the mills we see a few men, whitened with flour; in summer the mowers and haymakers appear for a few days upon the meadows, and are soon gone; in winter a few may return to poll the willows, tying their twigs into fagots, and leaving the stems standing, with white scarred heads; occasionally a man and a boy will come in one of the native high-prowed punts to cut and bind the dark rushes that, when dried, are used for matting, chair seats, and calking beer barrels; or the tops

FLADBURY MILL

of a withy bed will sway erratically as we pass, and tell of somebody at work there; or in autumn flood-time a professional fisherman, with his eel nets, is busy at the weirs. These represent the industries of Avon. Other human forms there are, which angle with rod and line—strange, infinitely patient men, fishing for eels and other succulent fish, catching (it may be) one dace between sunrise and sundown. Their ancestors must have had better sport, for Dugdale

THE GIG SEAT

constantly speaks of valuable fishing rights on the river, and many a farmer paid his rent to the Church in eels. To this day every cottage has its punt, and sometimes a seat rigged up in some likely spot over the stream. One such we marked with particular interest. It was, in fact, the body of an old gig; and therein sat an angler, and a glutton of his kind, for he had no less than seven lines baited, and the rods radiated from him like the spokes of a wheel. Perhaps it was his one holiday for the week, and he had hit on this device for cramming the seven days' sport into one.

Much might be written of Chadbury mill and weir as we saw them in

> "the twilight of such day
> As after sunset fadeth in the west."

But, again, it is hard to improve upon Ireland, who calls it "so rich a landscape that nature seems not to require the assistance of art, in the language of modern refinement, either to correct her coarse expression by removing a hill or docking a tree, or to supply her careless and tasteless omissions for the purpose of rendering her more completely picturesque."

In gathering darkness we dropped down beneath a hillside partly wooded, partly set out in young plum orchards, partly turfed, and dotted with old thorns. Here is Cracombe House, and beyond it lie two villages—Fladbury on the right and Cropthorne on the left, each with its own mill. A ford used to join them, but this was superseded by a bridge to commemorate the Queen's Jubilee. We did not come to it that night, for at Fladbury there stands a parsonage, with a lawn sloping between trees to the river, and on this lawn we heard the voices and laughter of friends in the dusk. Turning our canoe shore-ward, we hailed them.

If Kenilworth Castle and Evesham Abbey, structures so

massive, take but a century or so to fall into complete ruin, how soon will mere man revert to savagery? Our host at Fladbury parsonage was a painter, one in whom Americans take a just pride, and the talk at his table that evening was brisk enough, had we but possessed ears for it. Instead, we

CROPTHORNE MILL

who had journeyed for ten days from inn to inn, reading no newspapers, receiving no letters, conversing with few fellows, regarding only the quiet panorama of meadow, wood, and stream, sat in a mental haze. We were stupefied with long draughts of open air. The dazzle of the river, the rhythmical stroke of the paddle, had set our wits to sleep. Once or twice we strove to rally them, and listen to the talkers; but always the ripple of Avon rose and ran in our ears, confusing the words, and we sank back into agreeable hebetude. The same held us, too, next morning, as we ported our canoe over Fladbury weir, and started for Tewkesbury in the teeth of a west wind that blew "through the sharp hawthorn" and curled the water. The year had aged noticeably in the past night, and the country-side wore a forlorn look. None the less, the reaches below Cropthorne struck us as singularly beautiful. From a fringe of fantastic pollard willows, out of whose decayed trunks grew the wild rose and bramble,

orchards and pastures swelled up to a line of cottages and a square-towered church standing against the sky. Cropthorne church is to be visited as well for its beauty as for the monuments it contains of the Dingley family, to which the manor formerly belonged. There is one to the memory of Francis Dingley, Esq., who happily matched with Elizabeth, daughter of Thomas Brigge, Esq., and Mary Hoby, his wife, had issue eleven sons and eight daughters, and died in peace, anno 1624. The last of the Dingleys, a girl, married Edward Goodyeare, of Burghope, and bore him two sons, whose history is tragic. The elder, Sir John, was a childless man; and his brother, Samuel, who followed the sea,

WILLOWS BY CROPTHORNE

and had become captain of the Ruby man-of-war, expected in time to have the estates. But the two men hated each other, and at last a threat of disinheritance so angered the captain that he took the desperate resolution of murdering the baronet, and carried it out on the 17th of January, 1741. Dr. Nash tells the story: "A friend at Bristol, who knew their mortal antipathy, had invited them both to dinner, in hopes of reconciling them, and they parted in seeming friendship. But the captain placed some of his crew in the street near College Green, with orders to seize his brother,

and assisted in hurrying him by violence to his ship, under pretence that he was disordered in his senses, where, when they arrived, he caused him to be strangled in the cabin by White and Mahony, two ruffians of his crew, himself standing sentinel at the door while the horrid deed was perpetrating." The captain, with his two accomplices, was soon taken and hanged. He was a brave sailor, and had distinguished himself at St. Sebastian, Ferrol, and San Antonio, at which last place he burned three men-of-war, the magazine, and stores.

Four miles below Fladbury lies Wyre lock, with Wyre village on the right bank, its cottage gardens planted with cabbages and winter lettuce, or hung with nets drying in the wind. Across the river, a few fields back, Wick straggles, a long street of timbered cottages, with a little church, and

AT WYRE

OLD PEAR-TREES AT PERSHORE

NETS DRYING AT WYRE

before the church a cross. And ahead of us, over its acres of plum and pear orchards, the fine tower of Pershore rises.

Of all the abbeys that once graced the Avon, Tewkesbury alone retains some of its former splendor. Sulby is a farm-house; of Stoneleigh but a gateway is left; of Evesham an arch and a tower; while Pershore keeps only its tower and choir. Oswald, nephew of our old friend Ethelred, King of Mercia, founded a house of secular canons here

WYRE LOCK

A.D. 689, who by a charter of King Edgar, two centuries later, were superseded by Benedictine monks. Being built of wood, both church and convent were thrice destroyed by fire, first about the year 1000, then in 1223, and again in 1288; on this last occasion by the sin of a brother, who went a-courting with a lantern within the sacred walls ("muliebri consilio infatuatus, in loco illo sacrato ignem

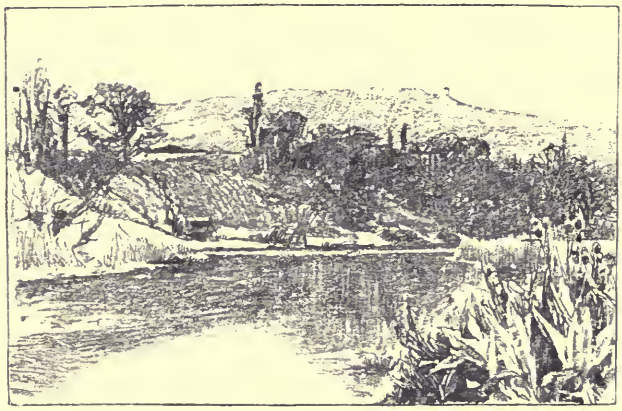
obtulit alienum "). This fire consumed not only the abbey, but the greater part of the town, and the wicked cause of it led to a suspension of all religious services until 1299, when the Bishop of Llandaff came and "reconciled" the Church. All that remains to-day is used as the parish church of the Holy Cross, and is a beautiful piece of Early-English work. Pershore itself bears all the markings of a quietly prosper-

THE SUMMER-HOUSE ON BREDON HILL

ous market town. Its wide street is lined with respectable red-brick houses, faced with stone, having pediments over their front doors, and square windows, some of them blocked ever since the days of the window-tax. Its plums are known throughout England; its pears yield excellent perry; and on pears and plums together it relies for a blameless competence.

PERSHORE BRIDGE

We passed Pershore bridge, which the Royalists broke down in their retreat from Worcester field; and Pershore water-gate. There was a water-gate at Fladbury also, one post of which we were assured was the same that Mr. Sandys planted in 1637. For long the chine of Bredon Hill



GREAT COMBERTON

had lain ahead of us, closing the view. We had first spied yesterday, from the hill-side below Cleeve, and ever since it had been with us; but below Pershore the river so winds that whether you row down stream or up, Bredon Hill will be found the dominant feature in the landscape. But whether a passing cloud paints it purple, or the sun shines on it, lighting the grassy slopes, and showing every bush and quarry on the sides, it is always a beautiful background for the villages that cluster round its foot — Great and Little Comberton, Bricklehampton, Elmley Castle, and Norton-by-Bredon. As we passed them the day relented for a while, and in the pale sunshine their gray church towers stood out, bright spots against the hill-side.

NAFFORD MILL

We floated under the steep bank that separates Comberton and its poplars from the stream, along to the dusty mill beside Nafford Lock, and drew close under this hill-side until the old beacon at its top (called the Summer-house) stood right above our heads. At Nafford Lock there is a drop of six or eight feet before the river runs on by yet more villages — Eckington, Birlingham, and Defford. Here in the sombre west ahead of us the Malverns come into view; and here, between Eckington and Defford, a bridge crosses, over

ECKINGTON BRIDGE

PERSHORE WATER-GATE

which we leaned for a quiet half-hour before going on our way.

It was a time, I think, that will pleasantly come back to us in days when we shall fear to trust our decrepit limbs in a canoe. The bridge, six-arched, with deep buttresses,

BREDON

seemed as old as Avon itself. It is built of the red sandstone so common in the neighborhood; but time has long since mellowed and subdued its color to reflect the landscape's mood, which just now was sober and even mournful. Rain hung over the Malverns: down on the flat plain, where the river crept into the evening, the poplars were swaying gently; a pair of jays hustled by with a warning squawk. Throughout this, the last day of our voyage, we had travelled dully, scarce exchanging a word, possessed with the stupor before alluded to. A small discovery awoke us. As we rested our elbows on the parapet, we noticed that many deep grooves or notches ran across it. They were marks worn in the stone by the tow-ropes of departed barges.

Those notches spoke to us, as nothing had spoken yet, of the true secret of Avon. Kings and their armies have trampled its banks from Naseby to Tewkesbury, performing great feats of war; castles and monasteries have risen over its waters; yet none of them has left a record so durable as are these grooves where the bargemen shifted their

ropes in passing the bridge. The fighting reddened the river for a day; the building was reflected there for a century or two; but the slow toil of man has outlasted them both. And, looking westward over the homely landscape, we realized the truth that Nature, too, is most in earnest when least dramatic; that her most terrible power is seen

TITHE BARN, BREDON

neither in the whirlwind, nor in the earthquake, nor in the fire, but in the catkins budding on the hazel—the still, small voice that proves she is not dead, but sleeping lightly, and already dreaming of the spring.

"Sed neque Medorum silvæ, ditissima terra—"

the note of Virgil's praise of Italy was ours for a while, and

NEAR ECKINGTON

his pride to inherit a land of immemorial towns — a land made fertile by tillage and watered by "rivers stealing under hoary walls."

A little below the bridge Avon is joined by the Defford (or, as it was once called, Depeford) Brook, its last considerable tributary, which rises on the west of the Lickey Hills; and a little farther on we turn a sharp bend where, above the old willows on our right, a field of rank grass rises steeply to Strensham church and vicarage. Behind the stumpy tower lies Strensham village, not to be seen from the river. Here, in 1612, Samuel Butler was born, the author of "Hudibras," and a monument stands to his memory within the church, beside other fine ones belonging to the Russell family. He was born in obscurity, and died a pauper—a poet (to use the words which Dennis wrote for his other monument in Westminster Abbey) who "was a whole

STRENSHAM CHURCH

species of poets in one; admirable in a manner in which no one else has been tolerable—a manner in which he knew no guide, and has found no follower." Very few can read that epitaph without recalling the more famous epigram upon it:

> "The poet's fate is here in emblem shown;
> He asked for bread, and he received a stone."

Below Strensham we pass a lock—the last before reaching Tewkesbury—and two mills, the first and larger and more modern one deserted. Mr. Sandys's task was here not difficult, for the Avon Valley is so level that only two locks are required in the fifteen miles from Pershore. We have scarcely left the lock when the sharp steeple of Bredon,

STRENSHAM MILL

ARROW-HEADS, NEAR TEWKESBURY

at the western extremity of Bredon Hill, points out the direction of the river. To this village, during the civil war, Bishop Prideaux, of Worcester, retired on a stipend of four shillings and sixpence a week. "This reverse of fortune," says Ireland, "he bore with much cheerfulness, although obliged to sell his books and furniture to procure subsistence. One day, being asked by a neighbor, as he passed through the village with something under his gown, what had he got there?—he replied he was become an ostrich, and forced to live upon iron—showing some old iron which he was going to sell at the blacksmith's to enable him to purchase a dinner." The living of Bredon was, in more peaceful times, one of the fattest in the bishop's diocese, as is hinted by a huge tithe-barn on the slope above us, with a chamber over its doorway, doubtless for the accountant.

From Bredon we came to Twining Ferry, three miles below Strensham, and the flat meadows beyond it, over which the tower of Tewkesbury Abbey and the tall chimneys of its mills now began to loom through a rainy sky upon which night was fast closing. It is just before the town is reached that the Avon parts to join the Severn in four streams—one over a weir, another through a lock, the remaining two after working mills. Being by this both wet and hungry, we disembarked at the boat-yard beside Mythe Bridge, and walked up to our inn beneath the dark, irregular gables of High Street, resolved to explore the town next day.

Tewkesbury lies along the southern bank of Mill Avon, the longest branch of our divided river, which, flowing under Mythe Bridge, washes on its left the slums and back gardens of the town before it passes down to work the Abbey Mill. One of these gardens—that of the Bell and Bowling-Green Inn—will be recognized by all readers of "John Halifax, Gentleman," and the view from the yew-hedged bowling-green itself shall be painted in Mrs. Craik's own words:

"At the end of the arbor the wall which enclosed us on the riverward side was cut down—my father had done it at my asking—so as to make a seat, something after the fashion of Queen Mary's seat at Stirling, of which I had read. Thence one could see a goodly sweep of country. First, close below, flowed the Avon—Shakespeare's Avon—here a narrow, sluggish stream, but capable, as we sometimes knew to our cost, of being roused into fierceness and foam. Now it slipped on quietly enough, contenting itself with turning a flour-mill hard by, the lazy whir of which made a sleepy, incessant monotone which I was fond of hearing. From the opposite bank stretched a wide green level called the Ham, dotted with pasturing cattle of all sorts. Beyond it

MYTHE BRIDGE, TEWKESBURY

TWINING FERRY

THE BOWLING-GREEN, TEWKESBURY

was a second river, forming an arc of a circle round the verdant flat. But the stream itself lay so low as to be invisible from where we sat; you could only trace the line of its course by the small white sails that glided in and out, oddly enough, from behind clumps of trees and across meadow-lands."

This second stream is, of course, the Severn, sweeping broadly by the base of Mythe Hill. An advertisement that we saw posted in Tewkesbury streets gave us the size of the intervening meadow; it announced that the after or latter math of the Severn Ham was to be sold by order of the trustees—172 acres, 2 roods, 28 perches of grass in all. The Ham is let by auction, and the money divided among the inhabitants of certain streets.

We lingered to observe the yew hedge, "fifteen feet high and as many thick," and talk to a waiter who now appeared at the back door of the inn. He seemed to feel his black suit

and white shirt-front incongruous with their surroundings, and explained the cause of their presence. The Tewkesbury Bowling Club had held its annual dinner there the night before. He showed us the empty bottles.

"Evidently a very large club," we said.

"No, sirs; thirsty."

The Abbey Mill, which droned so pleasantly in Phineas Fletcher's ears, stands close by, under the shadow of the Abbey Church, its hours of work and rest marked by the clock and peal of eight sweet-toned bells in the Abbey Tower.

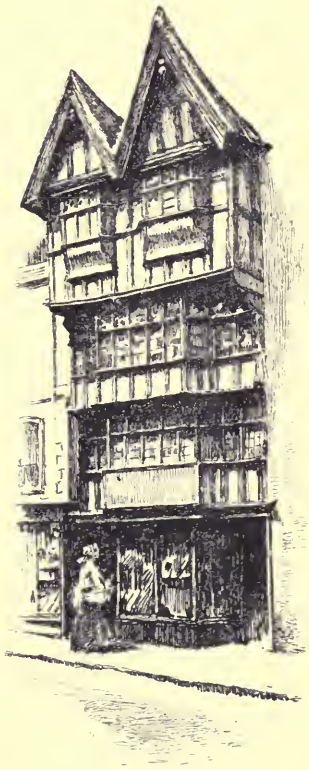
It is well that this tower should stand where it does. If to one who follows the windings of Avon the recurrent sug-

TEWKESBURY, FROM THE SEVERN

gestion of its scenery be that of permanence, here fitly, at his journey's end, he finds that permanence embodied monumentally in stone. No building that I know in England—not Westminster Abbey, with all its sleeping generations—conveys the impression of durability in the same degree as does this Norman tower, which, for eight centuries, has stood foursquare to the storms of heaven and the frenzy of men. Though it rises one hundred and thirty-two feet from the ground to the coping of its battlements, and though its upper stages contain much exquisite carving, there is no

MILL STREET, TEWKESBURY

lightness on its scarred, indomitable face, but only strength. The same strength is repeated within the church by the fourteen huge cylindrical columns from which the arches spring to bear the heavy roof of the nave. In spite of the groining and elaborate traceries above, the rich eastern windows, the luxuriant decoration of the chantry chapels and their monuments, these fourteen columns give the note of the edifice. To them we return, and, standing beside them, are able to ignore the mutilations of years, and see the old church as it was on a certain spring day in 1471, when its painted windows colored the white faces, and its ceilings echoed the cries, of the beaten Lancastrians that clung to its altar for sanctuary.



OLD HOUSE, TEWKESBURY

For "in the field by Tewkesbury," a little to the south, beside the highway that runs to Gloucester and Cheltenham, the crown of England has been won and lost. There, on the 4th of May, 1471, the troops of Queen Margaret and the young Prince Edward, led by the Duke of Somerset from Exeter to join another army that the Earl of Pembroke

was raising in Wales, were overtaken by Edward IV., who had hurried out from Windsor to intercept them. Footsore and bedraggled, they had reached Tewkesbury on the 3d, and "pight their field in a close euen hard at the towne's end, hauing the towne and abbeie at their backes; and directlie before them, and upon each side of them, they were defended with cumbersome lanes, deepe ditches, and manie hedges, besides hils and dales, so as the place seemed as noisome as might be to approach unto." From this secure position they were drawn by a ruse of the Crookback's, and slaughtered like sheep. Many, we know, fled to the abbey, were seized there and executed by dozens at Tewkesbury Cross, where High Street and Burton Street divide. Others were chased into the river by the Abbey Mill and drowned. A house in Church Street is pointed out as the place where Edward, Prince of Wales, was slain, and some stains in the floor boards of one of the upper rooms are still held to be his blood-marks. Tradition has marked his burial-place in the Abbey Church, and written above it, "Eheu, hominum furor: matris tu sola lux es, et gregis ultima spes." The dust of his enemy Clarence—"false, fleeting, perjured Clarence"—lies but a little way off, behind the altar-screen.

There is a narrow field, one of the last that Avon washes, down the centre of which runs a narrow, withy-bordered watercourse. It is called the "Bloody Meadow," after the carnage of that day, when, as the story goes, blood enough lay at its foot to float a boat; and just beyond our river is gathered to the greater Severn.

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